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## TIGERS, GOLD, AND WITCH-DOCTORS

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*Upper left: A TUNGUS WITCH-DOCTOR; upper right: A YAKUT WITCH-DOCTOR; lower left: A WITCH-DOCTOR; lower right: A SIBERIAN WITCH-DOCTOR.*

BY  
BASSETT DIGBY  
F.R.G.S.

ILLUSTRATED



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TIGERS, GOLD, AND WITCH-DOCTORS



## *Chapter 1*

### UNKNOWN SIBERIA

I am going to tell you about the biggest tigers in the world, and gold that vanishes, and witch-doctors who dance in a frenzy at the dead of night, wearing a robe decorated with fifty pounds of old iron.

About the ways of wolves and how to make bears run away. About the deepest lake on earth and fish that are burned in lamps. About caravan ruts that were made in the prairie four hundred years ago, the search for the tusks of great hairy mammoths, trees only three inches high, the tsar who became a tramp, Arctic natives who came from Turkey and smoke pipes of ivory a quarter of a million years old, a train that completely disappeared, how to ride reindeer, bushes that must not be passed until one tears off and ties on their branches a rag from one's shirt; and other things that I found out in the course of my wanderings in Siberia.

Strange, isn't it, that in a world with only five or six continents a whole half continent should be practically unknown to us? We know quite a lot about Australia and South America and North Africa. True, about all we know of Antarctica is that it is a desolate region of perpetual snow and ice, with outcrops of rock, bare hills, and absolutely no inducement to stay a moment longer than we have to—and that is all there *is* to know, apart from a catalogue of scientific observations and sundry recountals of the hardships, gallantly endured, by the explorers who passed through on the way to the South Pole.

Of Siberia—the top half of Asia—we have heard that Russia used to ship her convicts thither, and that there was one grand old mix-up out there at the end of the recent World War, with the American and Japanese expeditionary forces growing grey in the attempt to sort out Red Russians and White Russians and Pink Russians into some sort of order and jolly them into getting busy with a plough again instead of pulling a gun on the first

fellow who happened to have his back turned. Beyond that, the place might almost be a buried city in the jungles of Honduras for all you know to the contrary.

• Pull out the map and have a look at Siberia. The outline of the United States will help you to get an accurate idea of the distances.

• Picture yourself starting off from Leningrad, one gloomy February afternoon. If it is a typical gloomy Leningrad February afternoon, you'll be glad to be starting off anywhere. Look at the departure board in the ramshackle railway station. Adventure beckons. Trains are leaving for Archangel, up on the White sea, and the Crimean seashore resorts down on the Black sea, for Rumania, for Vienna, for Central Asian destinations within a morning's horse-ride of the frontiers of mysterious Afghanistan, and for Manchuria and China. Truly a wonderful range of destinations!

You clamber up into the cars. . . . A bell is clanged. No one among the jostling throng on the platform pays any attention to it. A few minutes



later it clangs again. Now the doors become jammed with crowds of friends answering the "All ashore!" signal, simultaneously with crowds of tardy passengers answering what *they* interpret as the "All aboard!" signal. The latter are laden with those extraordinary assortments of hand baggage peculiar to Russia and Siberia. It is no use asking me how one passenger can board a Russian train through the thick of a descending cataract of "see-ers off," while laden with a large brass *samovar* (tea-urn), a huge wicker-work basket with the lid coming off; a wooden sugar box full of pots and pans and crockery, with no lid at all; a bundle of bedding and an armful of sled-runners. I can only advise you to go and see for yourself. Every one is frantically imploring some one else to do what some one else does not in the least want, or intend, to do, with a view to easing the congestion. Yet, against all probability, and practically all possibility, the comers come and the goers go by the time the station bell is clanged three times. The locomotive gives an answering

hoot, a mournful hoot. With a jerk and a clang the couplings come taut—and off you go.

Now what do you see? Nothing at all, unless you are lucky. There are double windows in the cars to keep out the intense cold, and the majority of them frost over, so that you have to go down the corridor to the end platform if you want to get a glimpse of the landscape. And there are only half-a-dozen different glimpses all told. Every additional glimpse is a repetition of one of the others. A vast ocean of deep snow, now with occasional birch trees, now with fir forest breaking its monotony. Occasional snowed-under villages of stockaded log cabins, on distant slopes. Occasional rough sledges drawn by dejected-looking, head-hanging horses. The fence by the truck-side; and the telegraph poles, staggering this way and that.

This depressing monotony, broken only by a half-hour stop tomorrow at Vologda station, the junction for Archangel, and a stop on the following day at the town of Perm, lasts all the way to the Ural mountains. How eagerly you await the

sight of this famous range, after the tedious journey across the plains! But if you expect anything jagged, towering, picturesque, like the Rockies or the Pyrenees, you will be sadly disappointed. The earth merely heaves itself up in gradually steepening, forested hills, for a couple of hundred miles. Now and again there is a glimpse of a sheer cliff or a deep gorge or a pinnacle of rock, but, for the most part, such of the range as you can see is as tame as the Blue "mountains" of Pennsylvania. There is an hour's stop at the great station of Ekaterineburg, the chief mining town of this range of rich mineral deposits. Then down the train trundles to level ground again, and out on to the plains of Western Siberia. . . .

If any one told me that the west of Siberia was uninteresting I should immediately deny it and embark upon a priggish dissertation about the villainess of writers of guide-books, whose interest in lovely wild flowers, queer smells (and majestic stinks), home-made chimneys, what peasants are eating for supper at yonder table under the trellised vine, the occasions when stockings should be

worn, how cats are treated, what people pin up on the wall, the etiquette of singing at wine-shops, butterflies, the things that various sorts of people read, the songs of birds, the way the local fish are caught and which are the brutes among them that the Devil himself stuffed with bones, what the villagers do when they fall ill, the animals in the woods around and their queer ways and so forth, is nil. For why judge the allure of every place by the monuments it contains, The View, or the tradition that some one or other whose name got into books somewhere or other, did or said something there sometime or other (or even passed through, one sultry July afternoon, in a drunken stupor)? I should tell you that if, by some miraculous dispensation of Providence, I were enabled to kick every writer who had dismissed as "not worth a visit" or "without interest" places that I have found extremely interesting though totally destitute of historical parlour tricks, or Views, one pair of boots would not last for the job. I am well aware that in a country containing States like Colorado, California, and

Nevada, even Iowa, North Dakota, and Nebraska are full of interest of a very human kind.

But if you know those six States, you will know what I mean when I say that not many people would hesitate if given the choice of a holiday tour in the former group or the latter.

The west is largely bare prairie, in the south; dense forest, in the north; and monotonous grain fields, amidships. Central Siberia, the vast tract of country drained by the river Yenisei, is much more striking, from the point of view of the naturalist, the archeologist, the ethnologist, and the sight-seer. Eastern Siberia is most striking of all. Omsk and Tomsk, the two west Siberian cities, are comparable, in their relation to the country as a whole, to Winnipeg, Saskatchewan, Kansas City, or Omaha. But there is a romantic flavor of Sacramento about the city of Irkutsk, where you arrive after the train has been trundling on and on, eastward, for about six days and nights after leaving Petrograd. It has recklessness in its blood.

Hard-riding, hard-swearing, hard-drinking Cosacks, looting geographical secrets from nature and

furs from intimidated "Indians," were the city's founders. Then came the era of the men who got rich quick from gold strikes, and tea caravans from China, left great nuggets of gold about their desks as paperweights, had grand pianos fetched out by ten-horsed sledge from 3000-mile-distant Moscow—and slept on the floor, rolled up in fine furs and camel-wool rugs, as they considered bedsteads effete foreign boudoir fittings. To their children came the great excitement of the building of the railway that linked the Baltic to the Pacific, and the poignant years of the war with Japan when their city was the big base behind the lines where men "celebrated" before passing on to Manchuria to die, or returned as maimed, halt, and blind, while hectic buying and selling, by the million, went on in the crude log-walled houses and hotels.

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## Chapter 2

### THROUGH BEAR COUNTRY

One of my journeys in this region took me to the Bargusinsk peninsula, midway up the eastern shore of the great inland sea, Baikal. I was accompanied by a young Danish friend, who came out from Irkutsk and dropped off at a wayside station, to meet me in the village of Tataurovo.

We made an early start next morning. Clouds were smoking along the slopes of the steep, forested hills that loomed above the huddle of drab, sodden log cabins, as our *tarantass* trundled out of the stockaded yard. The trail was a slough of black mud after the night's rain. Bedraggled cows lingered in dejected groups, loth to set out to the swampy pastures. A damp, gloomy world. . . . It is difficult to be low-spirited, however, behind a pair of galloping horses. And we were heading into the mountains, into a region unknown to foreigners. North of the railway the Trans-Baikal, a

section of eastern Siberia as big as Pennsylvania, is *terra incognita* to the outside world.

After a few minutes' galloping over the strip of steppe behind the village, we passed through a thicket of fresh green birches and white flowering bushes. Then there was the river Selenga, running swift and glass-clear over its pebbly bed, to be crossed. The horses were led on to a crude flat-topped barge, and three ferrymen took us over by hauling at the wire hawser that stretched from bank to bank across our bows. We gave them a few kopecks and settled ourselves down again in the hay. But this proved to be only an island. A couple of hundred yards further on came a second crossing—with more kopecks to be distributed to more ferrymen; still, we were thankful for small mercies. We saw, downstream a short distance, a veritable archipelago. It would not have been surprising had the canny *moujiks* arranged to establish their ferry route at that point.

The second landing was under the cave-indented cliffs that hemmed in the original Selenga, cliffs that were washed by swirling waters in which



swam long-extinct monsters; now a carpet of level pasture-land covers the silted shoals.

During the morning we passed several small villages. We were surprised to see the extent to which the valleys were cultivated. The black earth flats were tilled and fenced. Large herds of goats, sheep, and cattle wandered along the brooks. Hardly had we left behind us a cluster of cottages and passed out into the fields before the outlying farms of the next hamlet came out to meet us. For five-and-twenty versts the track passed through practically one long straggling village, one of the longest unbroken strips of mixed farm-land I have encountered in Siberia. These villages looked prosperous and presented several characteristics which I had not noticed elsewhere. The *moujiks* and their womenfolk wore the picturesque garb of old Russia, rather than the drab, shoddy imitations of the clothes of the Occident that seems, alas! to be the favoured dress of "progressive" Siberia. From the cottages broad eaves jutted out over the street. Hardly a dwelling was without a beautiful piece of carving, generally on the window shutters but

often on the great gates giving entrance to the farmyard. The peaked tops of some of the gates had been worked with a fret-saw into magnificent screens more fit for the sanctuary of a cathedral than the portals of a piggery.

Peasant industries flourished hereabouts. Hardly a cottage was without the little wooden shingle, nailed up in a conspicuous position, depicting a boot, an axe, a ladder, a lock, a birch-bark bucket or what not, announcing to the passer-by, unable to read, what manner of wares were made within by the family during the long winter. One carpenter's cabin displayed a model axe of wood. It is wonderful, by the way, what the Siberian can do with his axe. He seems to despise the multitudinous gadgets that fill the Occidental carpenter's tool-bag. Give him an axe, and he will build you a cottage, and furnish it with benches and tables.

Now and then we noticed women sweeping the village street before their cottages with besoms, a startling sight indeed in slatternly northern Asia. Numbers of the peasants had even planted three

or four trees and shrubs in tiny enclosures beside their street windows. More often than not you may look in vain for a single tree in a Siberian village. . . . These were pious folk, too. They crossed themselves fervently as they passed their churches.

Soon the hills closed in about us, and a steep ascent seemed inevitable; but always, at the last moment, an unexpected turn in the trail switched us into another valley that rose in a steady uptilt. Presently we came to the posting station of Karimskaya and asked for a *samovar* and a hunk of black bread, while our next conveyance was being harnessed. While the tea was brewing, we examined the printed announcements tacked to the walls. We were pleased with a notice to the effect that postage stamps and post-cards might be obtained at "nominal" prices—the Russian way of conveying to the simple peasant the information that no extra charge was levied on account of the distance of the place, way back west of the Urals, where the stamps were made. Just above was the pink-eagled permit of the master of the posting-station, verifying the fact that he was required to keep

four pairs of horses for the conveyance of travellers. Then came the table announcing the name of the next posting station in each direction, its distance and the condition of the trail. On another wall, over by the great whitewashed brick stove, was an interesting appeal to the Buriats (the local "Indians") to bank their savings. "How much better," ran the announcement, "to lend your money to the Post Office Savings Bank, which will pay you annually 3 roubles 60 kopecks for every 100 roubles deposited, than to keep it at home in your felt *yurtas*, exposing you to robbery and murder, as, for instance, in So-and-So, and So-and-So, and So-and-So," naming districts that, of late years, had seen crimes of this sort, tidings of which must have spread widely among the apprehensive nomad cattle herders. This appeal was printed three times—in Russian; in phonetic Russian transcription of the throaty Buriat language, guttural "kh" sounds predominating; and in the curious Mongol script.

Shortly after leaving Karimskaya, the trail swerved sharply to the westward, and took us up

into a less populated district. Now the forest, seldom gashed by a field, crept down the hillsides to the very verge of the valley pasture, and the ever-rising pine-clad upheavals of rocky ground were no longer hills but mountains. Already, to the north and the west, two groups of snow-streaked summits loomed up among the clouds.

We halted our *yemstchik* at a village store, making a trifling purchase or two in order to obtain some change. The woman could not change a three-rouble note: all her money consisted of a few small pieces of silver, and some coppers, which were mainly half-kopecks. She sent out a boy to the more prosperous residents, but no one could muster the equivalent of a dollar. This lack of ready money has always been noticeable in Siberian villages. Even posting-stations and shops are frequently unable to change three-rouble notes. I once very nearly found myself marooned indefinitely in a settlement near Selenginsk, on account of having nothing but twenty-five-rouble notes. Waving these twelve-dollar bills before the eyes of men who owned their houses and fields and

herds of cattle and scores of horses, I might as well have been penniless. Existing on their own produce and bartering it for services rendered or goods supplied, the Siberian settlers have little need of currency. Moreover, seeing little of it, they distrust it profoundly. More often than not, a *moujik* given a silver coin, were it only a ten-kopeck piece, immediately examined it closely. If it were rather worn, from long circulation, he rejected it with an indignant "Akh! Khudi! Khudi!" ("It's a bad one!") Roubles and half-roubles he rang not once but many times, frequently rejecting them. . . .

A curious little hill rose steeply out of the valley, harder rock than its surroundings. On the top was a decrepit wooden chapel, with a natural lawn of turf. Below was a cabin, on a wall of which was drying a huge brown bear's skin. With an admonitory shout and gesture, the hunter, standing in his doorway, forbade us to take a photograph—but only for a moment, while he changed his shabby old peaked cap for his Sunday hat. Then he took his rifle down from its sling in the porch, and posed with great dignity. You didn't shoot a one

like that every day, he remarked to the *yemstchik*.

There are not many "Sunday hat" bears in the Siberian forests. Most of them are small, even for their species. Wandering about the northern half of Asia, you hear some jolly things about the bear; as in Canada, there does not seem to be any animosity against him. He is regarded as an amusing sort of person, but you are advised not to intrude into the family circle when Mother Bear has a brood of youngsters. Of course, grant the peasants, there *are* bad bears, just as there are doubtless bad butterflies. If you meet a bear, who shows no inclination to turn tail and run, the thing to do, you are told, is to strip off your clothes and dance, stark naked, with verve and vim. That is really very sound common sense. The bear is a simple soul and profoundly suspicious. The sudden change from a sedately walking dark suit of clothes to a prancing, cavorting White Bogey, all arms and legs like some giant albino spider, strikes Bruin as uncanny, and off he lumbers, with badly jarred nerves.

Bears, the Trans-Baikal Buriats told me, never

attack men sleeping by a camp-fire. On hearing this I gave a sigh of relief that proved premature, for my informants added that the baffled bear then trots off to the nearest stream, dives in, trots back to the fire and puts it out by rolling on the embers in his saturated fur. *Then* you are eaten—unless you have awakened in time to land the bear a swift kick as it is in the act of sitting down on the fire.

One rather expects to find bears and wolves in Siberia sharing the same region, for the residential requirements of both are very similar; but, as a rule, if you see a bear, it is an indication that wolves are not met with in the district. In the forested wolf country around Salaiyir, in the southwest, for instance, I found bears very scarce; in the Vitim forest, which teems with game, bears are plentiful and wolves but seldom encountered. There are large numbers of bears around the great inland sea of Baikal, but beyond being a disquieting recollection when I wanted a nap in the woods, they did not bother me. Siberian brown bears were used, in the old days, to deal with seditious clergy.



In 1570, Tsar Ivan the Terrible, having rounded up twenty priests who had been giving trouble, "commanded his great wild Beares to be brought out of their darke Caves; kept of purpose for such pastimes, at Sloboda Velica." Sir Jeremy Horsey reported the proceedings with unrestrained gusto:

"Upon St. Izaak's Day, in a spacious place walled about, seven of the principal fat-bellied Fryers were brought forth, one after another, each with his Crosse and Beads in one hand, and (through the Emperor's great favour) a Bore-speare of five foot in length in the other hand for his defence. A wilde Beare was let loose, which ranging against the wall, sented the Fryer and, made more mad with the people's shouting and cry, runs at him fiercely, and crusheth his head, body, bowels, legs and armes as a Cat doth a Mouse, and having thus devoured or torne the Fryer, was shot and killed by the Gunners. Then was another Fryer and a fresh Beare in like sort committed and likewise served, and so the rest, of which only the last had so much skill and agility that, setting the end of his speare in the ground,

and guiding it to the Breast of the Beare, he ranne himself thorow on it and both dyed in the place. This Fryer was canonized for a valiant Saint by the rest of his living Brethren. Seven other Fryers were condemned to be buryed alive."

Strahlenburg, the exiled Swedish officer who made good use of his Siberian sojourn, one hundred and fifty years ago, relates that if, voyaging down the Ob, you saw an Ostiak on the bank and called out "*Quarni-patsch!*" ("Bear's gall!") he would fetch out his fellow nomads from their encampment of skin huts and they would sell you plenty of it cheap. A bear's gall, well dried, cost, in barter, only a cent's worth of Chinese tobacco. I failed to discover, however, that the natives of these days attach any importance to this curious article of trade.

The bear plays an important part in the religious ceremonies of several of the native races, including all the Palæo-Siberians (Aleuts, Eskimos, Yenisei Ostiaks, Koriaks, Tchuktches, Ainus, Tchuvantzes, Kamchatdals, Yukaghirs, and Giljaks) and some of their Neo-Siberian neighbours.

The Neo-Siberian Voguls, who roam the sub-Arctic forests between the Ob and the Urals, go through a sort of mystery play with three carcasses, under the supervision of a *Shaman*, as the witch-doctor is called.

As with most of the mysterious ceremonies of Shamanism, great secrecy is maintained about the time and place of the event, lest Russian peasant settlers turn up and offend the participants by laughing and jeering.

On a bench, or table, the Voguls place the heads of the three bears; and, behind them, the skins, stuffed with leaves and grass. The bench is guarded on each flank by a man with a stick. Suddenly, in bursts a man with an axe, who pretends to attack the bears. The guards defend them, calling to the bears that not the Voguls are to blame for these killings but the Russians who made and brought thither the axes, bullets, and iron arrowheads that do the damage. After some jockeying for position and energetic mock fighting, accompanied by chants and protestations by the congregation that the guards are right, the spirits of the slain bears

are held to have accepted the explanation as satisfactory, and the crowd adjourns to enjoy a sort of barbecue of bear carcasses, which the women are cooking outside the cabin. Bowls of *kumiss* (fermented milk of mares) are passed round, and by evening every one is tipsy.

The bear festival of the Ainus of Sakhalien is much more elaborate. Preparations for it begin with the capture of a new-born cub, in April or May, when the natives are searching for lairs. It is turned over to a woman, who has to mother it until the autumn. By this time it is often very tame. When the congregation has assembled, the spirits are assured, in fervent chants, that the singers feel that they did wrong in catching the bear and holding it in captivity, but declare that it has received every kindness and consideration. Winter is now coming on, however, they chant, and so is the growing bear's appetite. Food will be scarce in the settlement, and it would be cruel to turn out the captive, nurtured all his life in the lap of luxury and quite unused to gaining his own livelihood, into the snow, to forage for himself.

In brief, it is clearly in his own best interests, they assure the spirits, that he should be slain.

Small wooden bowls of *kumiss* and chips of dry wood and snacks of food are flung on the fire, as libations; and there are small sacrifices to the spirit guardian (a functionary somewhat analogous to the patron saint of the Catholic) in the corner of the room in which he is believed to dwell.

Then a remarkable scene ensues. The crowd parts to allow the foster-mother of the doomed cub to approach its cage. She simulates keen anguish at its fate. She cries, screams, moans, and runs her hands wildly through her hair. *Kumiss*, or vodka, is splashed around, from a bowl, and some is offered to the little bear. When he has sniffed it, and backed away from it, it is flung over him. This is meant, mystically, as a libation—but the cub, not unnaturally, takes it as an insult and growls his resentment. The men draw back, to leave a clear space; and, forming a circle, the women and girls dance round and round the cage, singing a weird, high-pitched chant, the rhythm of which they emphasize by stamping and beating

their hands together. They then retire to the background, to watch the dance of the foster-mothers. The rearer of the cub, and as many of the women who fed and tended the cubs of previous years as can be found room for, perform this, pretending to be grief-stricken and acting as if their own baby were about to be taken away from them and sacrificed.

After this, the unfortunate little creature is killed, in a peculiarly brutal manner, by a pointed stake being rammed down its throat and through its entire length. The body is then as respectfully placed in an attitude of repose as if it were human; ornaments, ritualistic and otherwise, are placed on and around it, and bowls of food and drink for the refreshment of its now disembodied, but no less living, spirit. The people eat and drink, cracking jokes with each other and frequently making a courteous or jovial remark to the cub's spirit, which is treated quite as a fellow guest. After this diversion, the little dead bear is beheaded and cut up. His liver is a special perquisite of the women, a piece being given to each of them. The blood is

a special perquisite of the men, who take it in turn to drink from the crock into which it is drained. The following day there is a feast, and the rest of the cub is consumed.

The Giliaks, a fishing and hunting folk whose clans are to be found north of the Ainu country and along the desolate beaches over on the mainland, at the mouth of the great river Amur, also make a great affair of the bear festival, and observe a highly involved ritual in its performance.

There are some very good shots among the mountains of the Trans-Baikal. Most of them use cheap old army rifles, and bring down not merely bears, but even winging pigeons and bōlting hares, with the automatic precision of a Bisley marksman.

Toward the end of one afternoon we came to a village, where we unfurled the crude locally-drawn map which we had managed to obtain in Irkutsk. In ten minutes half the inhabitants were crowding around to get a glimpse of it. Many of them had never seen a map of any kind, and none of them had seen a map that had condescended

to chart their little huddle of log cabins. "We're on the map! What do you think of that!" a *gramotnik* (one who can read and write) declared excitedly to the crowd. They gazed at each other with amused astonishment and pride. "Well, well!" they kept repeating. "*We're on the map!* Just fancy that—this little village of ours." A woman shrilled an instruction to a small boy near me, and, butting his way through the thicket of legs around us, off he scampered to a cottage where an old man was leaning out of a window. "Grandfather!" he shouted as he ran. "*We're on the map!* The name of our village is written on a map the foreigners have brought. Mother says so!" However, when a huge fellow lurched up, cheerily announced, "I'm drunk!" and besought us to let him search, with a tarry finger, for his native village in Russia, some five thousand versts to the west of the edge of our chart, we begged to be excused and told them to hustle up and get our relay of horses.

Thus far we had been rather disappointed in the scenery. The trail seemed to be dithering about instead of heading up over the watershed. Half a



mile farther, however, great masts of larch and cedar straggled out to meet us, and a few moments later we were swallowed up by the *taiga*, the dense tangled primæval forest of sub-Arctic Siberia. The trail was only ten feet wide. The great firs and pines met overhead, cutting off most of the light of day. Our thoughts turned to the lynx, whose pleasing custom it is to crouch along a branch in just such spots as this, critically inspecting the diners that pass to and fro below, before dropping on the repast that best happens to suit his appetite at the moment. . . . We passed a lopsided wooden cross, the sign of the spot where a wayfarer had been murdered, a sudden reminder of the hobby of some of these simple Siberians of apostolic mien. The soil had been so recently piled up that no grass yet grew upon it.

"I hope none of the garroting hack-drivers of Irkutsk are spending a profitable summer holiday up this way," said my companion, who toiled for his bread in that unorthodox city and profoundly distrusted *isvostchiks*. In the raging blizzards of winter nights some of them are, indeed, prone to

drive up close to the sidewalk, and lasso an unsuspecting passer-by with a strong cord fixed to the seat of their sledge. Then, lashing their horses into a gallop, they drive off into a side-street, to go through the pockets of the bruised and bleeding corpse dragged in their wake. If pursued, they just "cut the cable" and disappear into the driving snow. This sport is not confined entirely to the lonely suburbs. A few months previously the mounted police had chased and caught a garroter who had adroitly bagged his fare from the sidewalk of the Bolshaya, the "Broadway" of the city, just under an arc lamp, at ten o'clock in the evening. It is astonishing what you can get away with in a blizzard. . . . Each successive spring thaw brings to light the bodies of hundreds of murdered men, along the trails of Siberia. Women are seldom murdered.

The *brodyag*, or tramp, usually kills because he needs a new pair of boots or a nice warm coat. He is not in the least like an American "bad man," who makes a vocation of hold-ups and robberies. He has neither the brain, the nerve, nor the incli-

nation for that sort of life. Far more often than not he is quite devout, attends church whenever he can, and makes pilgrimages to monasteries and holy shrines. He wears, on a cord round his neck, a little gilt cross, and sedulously salutes the *ikon* in the corner when he enters a room. He can always obtain gifts of food, but people are so mean about providing one with clothes. He knows that if he accosts a passer-by, along some lonely forest trail, and remarks amiably: "Good morning, brother. What chilly weather we have been having recently. I must really have a new coat in place of this threadbare one that is full of holes, too. That looks a very nice coat that you are wearing. Personally I do not like double pleats at the back, but those high sheepskin collars are fine things for keeping the cold air away from one's neck. You may give me your coat, brother," there will be a fuss, and that the churlish fellow will pull a gun on him, run away, or belabour him with his cudgel. So, having no stomach for brawls, he bides his time and kills his man by creeping noiselessly up behind him or, preferably, as he is taking a nap by

the wayside. The *brodyag*'s favourite murder is to split open the head of a sleeping man with his axe. Deftly done, it causes little or no disfigurement of the clothing. There was a case, near Verkhnie Udinsk, of an old gentleman of the road being stopped by a passing group of army officers whose suspicions were aroused by noticing blood trickling from a sack on his back.

"What have you got in that sack?" he was asked.

"Only my own things, *Barin*," was the reply.

"Show me. Hurry up, now. Undo your sack!"

The *brodyag* obeyed.

An officer stooped and fished out a human leg. And another.

"What are these?" he asked.

"My new boots, *Barin*. They were difficult to pull off him, so I reckoned I would take them along just as they were, and get them off later on." He added that he had always coveted a pair of those handsome white felt snow boots, ornamented with stencillings in black and pink, and that at last Fate had rewarded him. That morning he had found a

sledge standing still in the woods. The reins hung loose on the pony's back. A man was snoring in the hay, an empty vodka bottle by his side. A single well-placed crack on the back of the head—and he had no further need of boots. The body was dragged into the snow-covered undergrowth, and the *brodyag*, deftly busying himself with his axe, obtained his heart's desire.

The officers shot him on the spot and threw his body into the Selenga, along with his gruesome loot. . . .

The bodies of the winter victims of wayside assassins are nicknamed "snowflowers," because they become visible as soon as the spring sunshine melts the drifts. . . .

We watched eagerly for the watershed divide. Divides always fascinate me. I like to sit drumming my heels on a rock and saying to myself: "Well, here it is. I've found it. A hundred yards over yonder the trickle of water is on its way to the Atlantic and a hundred and fifty yards to the right that other trickle is on the way to the Pacific." A few miles south of Toulouse, a little

rocky ridge, about twenty feet high, runs across a sparsely-grassed meadow. If you empty a cup of water on one side of it, you are feeding the Mediterranean; if on the other side, you are making the Atlantic a little bigger. The destination of the headwaters on some of the African divides is even more the whim of chance. A couple of surveyors of my acquaintance used to amuse themselves by dropping a newt (little water lizard) into a certain small pool up in the Kenya highlands and betting on whether it would start to swim down to the South Atlantic or to the Indian ocean—the same pool trickled off in both directions. Here, in the Trans-Baikal, at many points, only a few yards divide springs which feed the Arctic ocean from others swelling the China sea.

The exact point of this divide we were crossing was not clear, for the trail passed through a matted carpet of pine needles, and the first trickles began to appear only some way down the mountain-side, in the boggy thicket. At last, however, we noticed a tiny brook flowing northward, and the descent began. The birches now dwindled into insignifi-

cance among the towering masts of huge larches and pines that ran clear up to a height of one hundred feet and more before a branch jutted out of their straight smooth trunks. I examined the butt rings of one of these monsters that had recently been felled. It was nearly four hundred years old. Magnificent planks, a yard wide, could have been sawed from its trunk, but the axemen were merely hacking it into stove logs.

*Ryabchiks* (ptarmigan) were feeding along the edge of the trail, in couples and groups. They waited until our *tarantass* was almost upon them, and then their flight was only to a point a few hundred feet ahead, when they recommenced pecking and scrabbling in the dust until we were so close that our horses seemed likely to trample them underfoot. One pair thus accompanied us, refusing to stand aside or drop behind, for more than a mile, taking flight and alighting again a dozen times.

Just before dusk, the setting sun cast a rosy glare through a rift in the clouds, suffusing the tops of the pines with gold and pink, while the

gloom of approaching night lay in the forest below. Emerging into a clearing, we clattered over the bridge of a foaming mountain stream, scattering a frightened flight of swallows and black-bibbed wagtails. Hardly more than knee-deep, its waters of newly-melted snow ran like a mill-race. While we strolled along the bank, picking forget-me-nots and violets, mosquitoes and a cloud of tiny, but hardly less irritating, flies swarmed about us. These were the first mosquitoes of the year; and our boots, we noticed, were drenched with dew, the first evening dew of the brief Siberian summer. A little farther on we passed another wayside cross. . . .

Now the mist began to rise; with it mingled wraiths of the languid smoke from a smouldering forest fire. The horses' ears twitched nervously, and they slackened speed, sniffing. The trail crossed a recently burned-out track, where leaning blackened birches swayed unsteadily this way and that, just held up by their tap-roots. Here and there flames still flickered from resinous trunks of pine.

And, at dusk, we came to a collection of shacks,



called Khaimskaya, a picturesque little place on the bank of the Khaimka. Here we had to stay for two days, as all the horses available had been requisitioned by the wife and family of the Governor of the Trans-Baikal, who were going up to the Turka sulphur springs, to take the waters. Poor Maurice was grievously bitten by bedbugs during the night, though, to his annoyance, I escaped unscathed. The Khaimka was full of big trout, but we could not find any bait—even the domestic bugs had vanished with the dawn. I tore up scores of tufts of coarse grass, in search of worms, but the roots were still frozen in. We pulled bark off trees, in search of spiders. We stalked, and swatted at, the occasional bees and flies and butterflies we met in the sunny glades. But in vain. Then, mustering what resources remained to us, we made "flies" of bits of pigeon feather, and we loaded Maurice's revolver. Our improvised flies failed to arouse the faintest interest in the trout. The worm-like strips of ham merely mildly disgusted them; when a hammy taste streaked downstream from about three inches ahead of their noses, they moved.

aside to avoid it. Nor, apparently, did we have any luck with the shooting. Eventually, after practice on the fish and on sticks poked into the water, we mastered the angle of refraction and aimed not at what we saw but what we knew must really be there, though it didn't look it—but by that time the trout had got uneasy and drifted into the cover of boulders and shelving overhangs of the bank. . . .

The run down from the warm forest glades of Khaimskaya brought a dramatic contrast. In the two or three hours' journey to the village of Gremyatchinskaya, the advance of spring rolled backward, like a film. Butterflies became fewer, and vanished. So did flowers. Birch leaves became smaller and smaller, now only opening buds, now buds that had not yet begun to open. When we caught sight of the great lake it seemed to be lashed into a spume of white waters by a gale, though only a breeze was blowing up in the hills through which our trail descended. Not until we were quite close did we suddenly realize that what we saw was drifted pack ice, a belt many miles

broad, blown in against the east shore. Down south the Baikal ice had disappeared several weeks previously.

One hundred and fifty years before, John Bell of Antermoney, on his diplomatic mission to the Emperor of China, ran into the same phenomenon outside the Selenga delta. Seeing the pack ice in the distance, as late as May 18, he mistook it for "cockle shells or white sand."

### *Chapter 3*

#### THE WORLD'S DEEPEST LAKE

The most interesting feature of all Siberia is its great inland sea, Baikal. Not a mere drainage pool, like most great lakes and inland seas, it was formed volcanically by a cataclysmic explosion that ripped open the earth's crust along the line of the river Angara.

It is nearly four hundred miles long and averages about thirty-five miles wide. Victoria Nyanza and Tanganyika, in Africa, are of bigger area, but Baikal is the deepest fresh-water hole in the world. It is almost a mile from the surface to the bottom in one part. Strange precious stones are found in the country around it. Strange creatures live on the surface and in the depths. Strange changes of water level occur. Peculiar peoples roam the forests that rise from its shores, and it constitutes an abrupt boundary between much of the fauna and flora of Europe, and of Asia.

Shaped like a scimitar, Baikal's regular outline is broken only by three features—the low marshy delta of the Selenga, in the southeast, and the holy island of Olkhon and the Bargusinsk peninsula about halfway up. But the regularity of its outline on the map gives no idea of its very picturesque shores, which consists of innumerable little bays and capes, usually with steep, wooded mountain slopes immediately behind. Sometimes the mountains end abruptly in precipices dropping into the sea, like the cliffs of the Palisades of the Hudson. Sometimes they draw back for a mile or two, leaving behind the shore a level tract of turf, birches, and willow bushes that in summer is one great meadow of wild flowers. It is impossible to follow the shore on foot for long, however, on account of the number of rushing streams cascading down from the mountains above you. These torrents are generally icy cold and run so fast over the bouldery beds that you cannot wade them. All the Baikal boats are of clumsy construction, so heavy that it needs several men's strength to haul them up on the beach. The lake is liable to sudden and

very ugly storms, moreover, that make its navigation dangerous.

At the mouths of the bigger streams, where the bar is low enough to give entry to boats, there is usually a fisherman's hut or two, and a craft that will ferry you over. In the other event, there is nothing for it but to turn your back on the shore and follow the stream up the mountainside until you come to a spot where you can cross. That spot may be thirty yards, or thirty miles, away, so it is no use planning to cover just so much of the shore every day. The steeper the stream, the better your chances of finding a way over before nightfall, for then the torrent cuts deep and there are big rocks in the bed. The wandering native generally gets over by making a bear bridge—felling a tree so that it falls across a narrow. But, unfortunately, he is prone to combine it with a scheme for trapping the wild animals that come over after he himself has passed. The trap is not always hidden in litter on the tree-trunk itself. It is often under the apparently untouched turf or pine-needles a few feet away on the bank at either

side. The trap itself may be a horrible-looking affair like a huge rat-gin; or a deep pit with sharp stakes driven firmly into the bottom, and those stakes may be poisoned. So it is far healthier to resist the temptation even to go near a convenient-looking bear bridge and to make another one with your own little axe, at the next point upstream where a suitable fir is growing on the verge of a suitable "narrow." . . .

Of Baikal's many curiosities, the most striking, perhaps, is its race of seals. The seal does not belong in any sort of fresh-water environment. Particularly does he not belong in the middle of a great continent, some *three thousand miles* upstream from the sea. The Baikal seal is a special species, practically identical with the seal of the Caspian sea, and a near relative of the non-migratory ringed seal, a species that lives along the shores of the Arctic ocean. The Caspian, of course, is not even connected with the real sea. It is a great inland lake into which the river Volga is continually pouring enormous quantities of water without making it any fuller. The sun and the sand

may dispose of the Volga's water—or there may be a subterranean outlet, yet to be discovered, into the Black sea. The seal must breathe, however, so he could not come in and out that way. Besides, the species found in the Caspian does not occur in the Black sea. What apparently happened tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of years ago, was that prodigious volcanic disturbances flooded vast regions of Asia, forcing back to dry land the multitude of Siberian beasts whose bones lie embedded in the ice of the prehistoric big-game graveyards found by Toll in the New Siberian isles, up in the Arctic, depositing the drifts of seashells that have been found in the Central Asian deserts, and splitting open the great rift of Baikal. As the water receded, this species of seal found itself isolated in various huge puddles remaining after the surface of the continent had been bulged up, by shrinkage of the earth's crust, above ocean level. In the natural course of events, it would have died out in some of the after-flood puddles, from disease, persecution—or just the puddle drying up under it. It is known to survive in the two biggest pud-



dles, the Caspian and Baikal. Quite possibly, when explorers have paid more attention to the numerous lakes of Central Asia, more little colonies may be found. Seals are very gregarious and local creatures, and there are very few, or no, boats on some of the big lakes south of the Altai mountains, where, out on a mass of rocks, or the shores of a distant island, these animals may well occur.

Even on Baikal, seals are rarely seen outside certain well-defined areas. The chief locality is just north of the Bargusin peninsula, and a good many frequent certain patches of rocks along the shore of the island of Olkhon. Early spring is the time when they are caught. Sometimes natives rig up a white sheet in front of a little sledge, which enables them to approach near enough to shoot without alarming the quarry. Other times, net traps are placed in the holes through the ice where the seals must come up to breathe; or the hunters, lurking behind ramparts of snow at the edge of the holes, harpoon them with javelins when they appear. The Tunguses and Buriats who do the seal-hunting tell you that the creatures keep open

their own breathing-holes by taking it in turns to blow on the constantly and quickly forming film of ice. That is the only way they can account for the holes' not freezing. My own explanation, however, is that the seals congregate in winter in waters where warm volcanic springs jet up from the bottom. There are plenty of such springs ashore, in the Bargusin and other riparian regions around the northern half of Baikal, and there is a strong probability that many are present under the water, too.

The meat of the seals is eaten, raw, dried, and cooked. Some of the skins are used for clothing and some of the oil is used by the boot- and shoemakers of Central Siberia, for treating leather. The pick of the skins, however, find their way down to China, where they are dyed and incorporated in various ceremonial robes of high officials; and most of the oil, too, is bought by the Chinese and Manchurians.

Nobody knows how many active volcanoes there are in unmapped northeastern Siberia. The nearest to Baikal of the dozens up there, so far as

I was able to discover, is several hundred miles away. But there is a good deal of volcanic uneasiness in the earth's crust around Baikal, and I should not be surprised to hear that a dormant crater had reopened. Queer things have been going on during the last century or so. In the summer of 1818, for instance, the surface of the water rose suddenly more than six feet and remained at that abnormal level for some time. There was no obstruction to the outflow at the southwest end, nor had there been heavy rains. Ever since then the surface has remained slightly higher than it was prior to 1818. When the rise occurred, the little river Irete, to the northeast, suddenly overflowed its banks, owing to a great flood of water pouring out of a mountain in the base of which are its headwaters. One summer, some years later, when no rain had fallen for weeks, the upper waters of the river Lena, which rises in the mountains just west of Baikal, suddenly rose several feet. Earthquakes have often rocked the Baikal region. An old Verknie Udinsk church, built about two hundred and fifty years ago, was made with specially thick

walls, to withstand them, as the Buriats gave warning of their frequent occurrence. But a neighbouring church not similarly protected had a wall badly cracked. About eighty years ago the village of Stepnaya, some twenty miles from the mouth of the Selenga, was destroyed by earthquake. One part sank at first but was then thrust up and left in a position thirty feet higher than it had formerly stood; the rest was swallowed up in the waters of Baikal. Along some tracts of the mountain slopes of the northeast shore, very hot and actually boiling sulphur springs occur, and the ground is free from snow in the depth of winter. On the lake itself, in calm weather, big waves often rise in a seething hill of broken water.

The city of Irkutsk, forty miles downstream from the Baikal outlet, has been shaken by several earthquakes during the past century. The traveller Erman was there when, throughout the night of March 17, 1819, a large part of the Trans-Baikal, clear down to the Mongolian frontier, was rocked. This, it will be noticed, was a year after the thirteen thousand square miles of Baikal's surface went

up six feet. "I was awake," he recorded in his diary, "when suddenly, about forty minutes past four in the morning, the bed on which I lay began to vibrate rapidly and uninterruptedly. At the same time and with the same speed there was a loud clattering and rattling like that to be heard in a mill. When the vibration and noise had lasted about ten seconds there followed a still more violent shaking of the walls; and then, after five seconds, a hollow report. The ground shook so violently that for some instants I expected our wooden house, which already was tilted much to one side, would fall. There followed, however, only vibrations like those at the beginning, lasting the same time and attended in like manner by rattling and rolling noises. Then all was quiet. I watched in vain for the repetition of the mysterious occurrence, which left nothing behind but amazement and awakened curiosity. The audible parts of the phenomenon might be compared to the rolling of thunder which has once been interrupted by a loud clap, and then continues, gradually diminishing in force. . . . In about a week's time it

became known that the earthquake had been felt the same night in Kiakhta and Nijni Udinsk. At the latter place, which is encompassed like Irkutsk by carboniferous sandstone, the stoves in the houses were in some instances thrown down by the rocking of the ground. In Irkutsk, too, the phenomena seemed to differ in various parts of the town. In a stone building of two storeys, ikons fell from the nails with which they were fastened to the walls. A soldier who was standing guard before the same house, being questioned immediately afterward respecting the earthquake, declared that he had observed nothing of it; yet a pile of logs resting on the ground in another part of the town was thrown down. . . . Two lighter shocks had been felt here in the summer and autumn of the same year, and the frequency of these visitations gives weight to the opinion of the people of Irkutsk on the subject. With reference to the rushing noise accompanying the earthquake, and its connection with the condition of the atmosphere, I will quote the following Russian account, as supplementary to my own observations: 'On March 17, New Style,

1819, between nine and ten o'clock in the evening, there began an earthquake at Kiakhtha, with merely a hollow and rolling noise; an observer placed emphasis on the point that it was a subterranean noise. A little later came a clattering and creaking of doors and windows, accompanied by a violent rocking of the ground. The latter phenomenon, however, was perceived only at the northern end of the town; at the southern end no rocking or vibration was felt, yet there the subterranean thunder was heard as plainly as at other points.' "

Erman mentions another earthquake at Kiakhtha, which occurred at five minutes to eight on the evening of January 3, New Style, 1835, in damp and foggy weather: "The first thing observed was a hollow sound, interrupted by single claps like thunder, resembling altogether the sound of a distant storm. After that followed shocks which lasted about five seconds, and ended with so violent a concussion that all the buildings quivered. . . . Many other manifestations of volcanic agency," he adds, "are discoverable through the Zabaikal region, and in the northern half of the

Government of Irkutsk, in the composition of the rocks and their position. In the plain along the Angara, below Irkutsk, prevails the finely grained sandstone of the carboniferous system. Strata of pure coal, nine feet thick, have been found in it. It extends northward as far as Nijni Udinsk; and, to the south, insulated masses of the same formation are found far beyond Lake Baikal. I received from the steppes of Selenginsk, through the kindness of Mr. Yuill, specimens of black and shining stone coal, with sulphureous pyrites disseminated through it."

Another explorer, Georgi, describes sixteen Trans-Baikalian earthquakes, the worst of which shook some of the crosses from the church steeples and threw him off the stove at the police station in Selenginsk, where the *ispravnik* (police chief) was putting him up for the night.

You must remember, by the way, that such a stove is a great solid mass of brick, into a small cave in which the fuel logs are pushed. It is flat on top and only just pleasantly hot. The privilege of spreading one's mattress there at night is accorded



to Grandpa, to Grandma, or to an honoured guest.

It took a long time before the atlases and records of travel managed to get the map of Baikal correct and the facts and figures about this great lake have not yet been straightened out. Almost every traveller, Russian and foreign, has reported measurements that differ from those of the last man, and the next. A combination of vodka and the garrulous proneness of the educated Siberians to give one some of their geographical measurements in feet, yards, and miles, some in metres and kilometres, and some in sarzhens and versts—all in the same breath—may well have had a good deal to do with this statistical confusion.

A good many amateur soundings of the deep holes have been made, too, by men who ought to have known better than to proceed so unscientifically. The quite justifiable retort of some of them would be: "But I was merely amusing myself—not conducting a formal investigation for posterity. Why shouldn't I go out in a fishing-boat with a chunk of rock, a mile of cord, and a windlass, and make jottings of the depths when I

seemed to find bottom? It isn't my fault if I tell what I found to a friend, who tells another man, who tells another man, who tells an inquisitive foreigner, a few years later, that a Siberian professor, on vacation from Tomsk, himself discovered that the depth was so-and-so. I'm quite aware that strong currents in the depths may have bent my line into something no straighter than Harry Lauder's walking-stick, before it touched bottom; that a deep current may have continued to pull out the line long after the weight had got to the bed of the lake; and, in brief, that deep sounding is a highly technical job, needing special knowledge and gear that I did not have at the time—but I was only having a lark for my own edification."

Still, some of the conflicting statistics about Baikal deserve to be put on record, as a warning to future travellers who might be tempted to believe what long-established residents in the country would tell them.

Murray's *Guide to Russia*, edition of 1875, by an ex-British consul and second secretary to the

British Embassy at St. Petersburg, declares that Baikal is one hundred and twelve versts wide and one hundred versts long! In the large and carefully prepared map engraved by, or for, Erman, in 1842, which is to be found in that explorer's work entitled *Voyage scientifique dans l'Altai oriental et les Parties adjacentes de la Frontière de Chine, fait par l'ordre de S. M. l'Empereur de Russie par Pierre de Tchibatchev, gentilhomme de la chambre de S.M.I., et membre de plusieurs académies et sociétés savantes*, published in Paris in 1845, Baikal, depicted about three inches long, is represented as without islands. There is plenty of room, on that scale, to show the large isle of Olkhon, the area of which is about two hundred and ninety square miles.

Nansen says that the lake is 1,515 feet above sea level. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* declares that 1,360 feet is the correct figure. Another traveller says 1,561 feet; the same man says that the Mongols call it *Bei kul*, meaning Rich sea, and *Dalai nor*, meaning Ocean lake. Nansen, however, reports the native names as *Bai kul*, meaning Rich

lake; Dalai nor, meaning Holy lake; and Bai gal, meaning Abode of Fire. The name is Baiakhal, meaning Abundant Water, says the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Hawes gives the greatest depth as 3,185 feet, Nansen as 4,922 feet, and Stanford's *Compendium* as 4,500 feet. Cottrell reported that a Governor of Irkutsk had tried to find bottom with 1,000 fathoms (more than 6,000 feet) of line, but that the lead probably had not been heavy enough to carry the line down to the lake bed. Julius Price was badly out, with his report that the average depth was 5,400 feet and that no bottom could be found in some spots at 6,000 feet. Stanford gives the "mean depth" as 850 feet—but does not explain how that reckoning is made. The mining engineer, Henry G. Reed, gives 4,900 feet as the maximum depth. Baedeker's *Guide* (1914) says "over 6,500 feet in places." "Its average depth is rarely less than 819 feet, but in parts the ground has been touched only at 4,500 feet," reports Prof. J. Y. Simpson in his *Sidelights on Siberia*. P. V. Kulakov reports that the maximum sounding obtained was 803 fathoms. An interest-

ing expedition to take soundings was that which, under the leadership of Drizhenko, cruised about the lake in the little steamer *Innokenti*. It took out a Danish deep-sea sounding apparatus—and lost it, with most of its wire, when the very first sounding was made. Another apparatus had then to be “improvised”—and with my experience of Siberian improvisations, I’m inclined to be sceptical about the absolute accuracy of the results. However, the vessel took off-shore soundings every few miles, and rows of deep-sea soundings along seven lines; those of the latter in the northern part of the lake were pioneer records. Several soundings had already been taken in the southern part by the Polish exiles, Dr. Dybovski and Mr. Godlevski, who, dropping their wire through holes in the ice, obtained depths up to 747 fathoms. The engineer Bogoslavski subsequently claimed to have touched bottom at 791 fathoms. Drizhenko’s soundings showed that even between the island of Olkhon and the Sviatoi Nos (Holy Cape) peninsula, depths greater than 622 fathoms were found, and

right up at the northeast end of the lake, bottom was found only at 467 fathoms. Extensive shallows were found, as had been expected, off the Angara and Selenga deltas, and among the little Ushkani isles, but, according to Drizhenko, only about 8 per cent. of the entire area of the lake has a depth of less than 30 fathoms. A bulletin published by the Geographical Society of Toulouse, in 1906, declared that depths of 1,000 to 1,300 metres were of frequent occurrence, sometimes for a distance of 32 miles at a time, and that the lake is 2,000 metres deep in spots. Appleton's universal *Cyclopaedia*, edition of 1900, says that Baikal is 300 fathoms deep in places. The maximum depth is 3,185 feet, declared M. L. Van Scherpenzeel Thim, Belgian Consul General at Moscow, in his report of 1901. Depths of more than 5,000 feet have been found, said E. J. Harrison in a book published in 1910. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* gives the depth as ranging from 22 to upwards of 300 fathoms, which is palpably absurd, for that means that the bank goes down

sheer for more than 100 feet at the very brink, whereas I myself have waded far out from shore at many points.

So now you know the depth of Baikal.

I, personally, had not the time to measure its area, during my various visits, but, as doubtless you want to know the truth about it, I refer you to the following authoritative pronouncements:

Dr. Nansen	13,197 square miles
<i>Encyclo. Britannica</i>	About 12,500 square miles
E. J. Harrison	More than 20,000 square miles
Stanford's <i>Compendium</i>	Scarcely 14,000 square miles
Julius Price	12,441 square miles
Appleton's <i>Cyclopedia</i>	13,200 square miles
Dr. Lansdell	14,000 square miles
Kulakov	13,500 square miles
Professor Wright	12,500 square miles
Baedeker's <i>Guide</i> (1914)	13,185 square miles

Under water, the great lake is divided into two main pools, by the rocky ridge that crosses it from east to west, from the Selenga delta, at a depth of only about a couple of hundred feet. The deepest soundings have been found in the northern pool,

though a depth of 4,746 feet has been located south of the ridge.

The denizens of Baikal are very interesting. There is, for instance, the extraordinary lamp-fish, which the people call the *golomyanka*, which is cast ashore, often in large quantities, during stormy weather. It is hardly ever seen alive; the shock of the inshore breakers seems to kill it. I never heard of one being caught, either in nets or by hand-line. This little fish is only a few inches long, at the most. Its flesh is so soft and oily that it readily melts like butter. Even the heat of the sun is sufficient to reduce the dead fish to a mere head, backbone, and flabby strip of thin skin, lying in a pool of oil. The natives patrol the shore for it after wild weather, sometimes melting it down for lamp fuel and sometimes eating it. Some of the Russian villagers collect the oil in canisters and sell it to middlemen who come round to procure it for export to Manchuria. Quantities of *golomyankas* are sometimes thrown up after volcanic disturbances. The Tungus natives repeat an old legend that has been passed down by bygone generations to the



effect that storms in the mountains rush down, through subterranean abysses leading under the lake, and blow up these fishes from the great depths, where they seem to dwell.

Baikal is richly stocked with good eating fish and should be one of the best places in the world to establish canneries. The roes particularly are prized, and preserved to make *caviare*. Most of us think of *caviare* as merely a very costly luxury occasionally partaken of in expensive cosmopolitan restaurants—a mass of little balls of black india-rubber mixed with oil.

In Siberia, however, you find quite a range of *caviares* and their poor relations, which are called *ikras*. All of them are merely hard roes of fishes. The most expensive, which is very expensive even in Russia and Siberia, is the best quality of sturgeon roe, most of which comes from the Astrakhan fisheries. In this the little balls are not black, but dark greenish grey, and pervaded with what tastes very much like the dreaded cod-liver oil of old-fashioned nurseries. The price drops rapidly as the stuff gets blacker and squashier. The cheapest

quality you would mistake for prune jam, to look at it. Shops range the small tubs of *caviare* in a row, six or seven of them, each labelled with its cost. Every family knows what tub its friends usually buy from; little jokes are made: "Ah-ha, the Kusnetzovs have been here already!" exclaims a customer, on finding a certain tub nearly empty. Or: "Why, the Stalins must be expecting a rich uncle to dinner—look, they are buying from the seven-rouble tub today!"

Rightly or wrongly, I have always imagined that all the tubs were once top-priced and that the rest of the row represents successive stages from the prime of life towards the sere and yellow leaf of declining years. To consume the best quality is like eating gold. Those Siberians who are not rich buy it in small quantities, furtively, and have a little secret feast on it. I remember a drawing in one of the papers that turned the searchlight on to best-quality *caviare* addicts and their unsociable vice. It showed a house, the front and back walls of which had been rendered transparent, where every member of the household, including the hired help,

had gone into a room alone, locked the door, and settled down to a private gorge.

I used to buy the various pink and red *ikras*, fresh or slightly salted, and not oily. They are very good and cheap. I wonder they are not canned and exported. One day, on the shore of Baikal, I came across a group of fishermen, who had just made a good catch, extracting the roes for *ikra* and tossing the rest of the fish back into the water. Mother Nature is very temperamental in her way of feeding you out in the wilds. Either there are thirty dinners for one man or thirty men for one dinner!

The forests around Baikal teem with wild life and offer a particularly interesting field to the naturalist who wants to make new discoveries. No extensive collecting and study has yet been done in the region. The insects along the west shore are chiefly east European species, and those along the east shore chiefly Far Eastern. Whether, to the north and the south of the lake, the Pacific hinterland Asiatics are advancing on Europe, or the European insects are spreading eastward, has yet to be ascertained. It would be very interesting to

cast about southward from the south end of the lake, for two or three years, tracing the various "Bali-Lombok lines."

The early investigators of the wild life of the Malay archipelago found that what appeared to be the dividing line between the Australian fauna and that of Asia was the mile strait between the islands of Bali and Lombok, halfway along the former land bridge that linked the two continents. But subsequent regional collecting has shown that there are a number of "Bali-Lombok lines" in the neighbouring seas. The line marking the border between Australian and Asiatic frogs, for instance, does not pass over the same part of the map as that determining the border between the butterflies; the birds, the snakes, the beetles, and other kinds of creatures each have their own frontier.

The only animals of the region which appear to be feared by the people are the lynx and the wild boar. The Siberian wild boar is the "*bad hombre*" of the wild-boar world. He is not yet accustomed to the sight of human beings—and he does not intend to be. John Bell of Antermony discovered

that, too, for he declared in his diary, with engaging frankness, "The hunting of these animals being a dangerous kind of sport, we carefully avoided their haunts." There is even a town called Kubansk, or Wild Boarville, as we should say. "Its founders knew how to run," an Irkutsk doctor assured me; "otherwise there would have been no Kubansk today!" . . .

Beavers have been exterminated by fur hunters in all their more easily accessible haunts, but there are still a good many on the countless streams and little lakes north of the lake.

The Tungus natives have a nice story about them:

All beaverdom is divided into two tribes, the Busy Folk (*Rabotniki*) and the Idle Folk (*Gulashniki*). The fur of the Busy Folk is in bad condition because they are left to do all the work of gathering food to tide the beaver town over the long winter. Not content with loafing in the latter part of the summer, the Idle Folk even ambush and beat up the Busy Folk, as they are bringing home the stores, and eat up the most tempting

morsels. However, as the hunters spare the shabby Busy Folk, and shoot only the sleek-coated Idle Folk, the former get the last laugh!

That greedy and predatory denizen of the forests, the glutton, too, the natives tell you, has a way of obtaining relief by walking between two trees growing close together, to condense his meal, after having dined not wisely but too well.

I have never seen so many squirrels as in some parts of the Baikal forests, although the fur hunters are always after them, but I failed to notice any crossing rivers on deliberately chosen boat-like pieces of wood, using their bushy tails as sails when the wind is in the right direction, as the peasants declare they do!

A good deal of the fur hunting is still done with bow and arrow. Big bags of squirrel are made in this manner. The Tunguses lure up roe-deer and musk-deer by imitating, on an ingeniously contrived birch-bark "whistle," the bleat of lost young ones. When inquisitive, maternally-minded deer approach to investigate, they are shot by an arrow from ambush. These natives still use a very dan-

gerous method of trapping, forbidden by the Russian authorities, when they think that they will not be discovered. Where a narrow ravine links two valleys or stretches of open country, and deer have been discovered occasionally to pass through it, a concealed battery of bows and arrows is set among the undergrowth, and connected with a thin cord of plaited horsehair spanning the gulch, down in the grass. I always took a keen interest in where I was stepping when passing such places.

There are no rabbits in Siberia, and hares, though extensively hunted, are not eaten. I know a man who used to run a trading store in West Africa. A lot of the blackamoors bought canned rabbit from him. It was just palatable meat to them. They had no idea what a rabbit looked like. Then, suddenly, the trade dried up. Nobody asked for a can of rabbit for a fortnight. My friend was annoyed, as he had recently imported a large consignment of a new brand, with a label showing, as the previous cans did not, a coloured picture of a fine buck rabbit sitting in the foreground, and,

at a short distance, a number of other rabbits nibbling the grass and frolicking with their young.

One day he tapped a can with his finger, and said to a customer: "Look, we've got in another shipment of rabbit. You used to buy two or three cans a week. What has happened to you fellows, that you've suddenly lost your taste for it?"

The blackamoor registered, as the film people say, extreme disgust, and replied, pointing at the picture of the creature:

"Puss! No eat. *puss!!!*"

That is the attitude of the Siberian peasant. He considers that hares are near relations of the cat tribe.

Nowadays, of course, it is America and the nations of western Europe that take the pick of the Siberian furs, but until forty or fifty years ago China had most of them, and Turkey, Persia, and Russia the bulk of the rest. It was the Chinese Emperor's courtiers themselves, the high officials, and the rich merchants, not their wives, who used to wear them, and outbid the rest of the world for the finest sables, martens, otters, beavers, and black



foxes. For beavers and the wonderful sea otters of the Kamchatka coast, for instance, they paid three or four times as much as could be obtained in Europe. The little white Arctic fox, which has become popular abroad as a summer fur, used to be regarded by the Russians and Siberians as merely suitable for bed coverlets. There used to be so keen a demand for the paws of silver foxes, which were utilized to adorn some fashionable official robes in China, that the four paws fetched many times more money than the rest of the pelt. The muskrat market was peculiar, in the days before the skins were made into coats. They were not worn but laid among one's stored garments and linen, to keep away the clothes-moths.

The worst wild beast in Siberia, by far, is the mosquito. Fortunately northern Asia is remarkably free from species of the malaria-carrying *Anopheles*; the nearest *Anopheles* region, I was often assured, was the mouth of the Volga, over in southeast Russia. But the myriads of what the entomologists quaintly term harmless mosquitoes are very trying in July and August, if you are near

swamps or forests. Up on the open prairie, of course, you are left in peace.

It is interesting to notice how in every land around the globe men argue which part of the country contains the most blood-thirsty mosquitoes. In America the Jersey skeeter seems to have the biggest backing of boosters; to this day I can recollect how perceptibly more like live veal than good red-blooded beef I used to return to Philadelphia, many years ago, after an evening's angling down among the dynamite sheds opposite Wilmington. It was more than I could comprehend, why the dynamite did not blow up more often than it did, when I saw the busy population on the necks of some of the poor wretches who were moving armfuls of the stuff that they could not drop unless they were prepared for a prompt journey to the Pearly Gates. In Siberia it has always been the Ilimsk skeeter that has been accounted the bloodthirstiest. The Tunguses have a sort of oath in their language that means, "May you be bitten by an Ilimsk mosquito!" (Not many Ilimsk mosquitoes, observe, but just one.) The

Baikal Tunguses shed their fur clothing on hot summer days, and go about stark naked—but they always carry a crock of smouldering deadwood punk, or pungent chips of cedar. (They dress before sundown.)

Before the Russians introduced the blessing of cotton mosquito netting, which is now considered a necessity by the native tribes, the tribesmen used to make a primitive kind of their own. During the long winter evenings the women and children interlaced, by hand, their carefully accumulated hoards of long hairs from horses' tails. I was shown a square of this netting by an old man in the village of Listvinitchnaya, who explained that it was formerly made also into a kind of suit.

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## Chapter 4

### BAIKAL'S LURID PAST

The navigation of Baikal has dwindled to insignificant proportions since the blasting of tunnels and the scores of miles of ledge along the sheer precipices at the southwest end of the lake which enabled the Trans-Siberian railroad to avoid having to transfer its passengers and freight on to the quay at Listvinitchnaya and Mwisovaya, and take them over by great ice-breaking ferries. The freeze-up occurs in January; the thickness of the ice varies greatly with the severity of the cold. Often it used to prove too much for the mighty icebreaker *Baikal*, and the passengers had to get out and proceed by sledge. The first steamship to appear on the great lake, so far as I could ascertain, was a launch brought overland in bits from Russia, about eighty years ago, in a long caravan of carts. Her owner was an Irkutsk merchant, Menshikov, who used her for the transport of chests of tea

which came up to his base on the eastern shore of the lake by camel caravan from China. It was an English engineer, Mr. Charles Lee, under whose supervision was built and assembled the first steamship of Siberian manufacture. That was some forty years ago.

The *Baikal* was built in the north of England, at the Armstrong Whitworth yards, and sent out in pieces to the lakeside village of Listvinitchnaya, where she was assembled under the supervision of British engineers, who spent two or three years there. She was a sturdy craft of 4,200 tons' displacement, driven by three four-bladed propellers, two astern and one in the bows. The rear propellers were made of steel, but the one up forward was of phosphor bronze. With all the 3,750 horsepower of her three triple-expansion engines in play, she was supposed to be able to make steady progress through two-foot ice at the rate of three knots an hour. Sometimes she did. There were three tracks on her deck, for holding passenger and freight wagons. Working with her was a smaller ferry, the *Angara*, of 1,200 tons' displacement,

driven by a single propeller. The hull of the *Baikal* along the ice line consisted of solid timber .6 metre thick, overlaid by a 2.5 centimetre armour of steel.

During her putting together, she was visited by the late Sir Henry Norman, M.P., who gave a graphic account of the amenities of life in Listvinitchnaya. "A nest of crime and robbery," he called it, "crowded during the summer with innumerable caravans bringing tea from China. Every civilized person carries a revolver there, and two if he is of a cautious temperament. Nobody thinks of going out after dark, and every week some one is robbed or killed. The whole population is ex-convict or worse. The boss of the labourers on the *Baikal* was in Siberia for outraging a child; the man who conducted me to where Mr. Douie and Mr. Renton were at work was a murderer from the Caucasus; a short time before my visit, another murderer employed on the ship had tried to repeat his crime and had been consigned to chains again; the very day I was there, the police were looking for a man who was wanted for killing eight persons, I was told, at one time. A

few months previously robbers had held up the mail cart proceeding from Lake Baikal to Irkutsk, shot four of its five guards, and stolen the gold." But with the building of the railway round the southern end of the lake, for 155 miles, the place lapsed into the sleepy, well-behaved little village that I found it when I was there last. Tea caravans no longer come there, and only a lot of great balks of timber and derelict ribs of barges, littering the daisy-strewn green turf along the low wave-lapped shore, remained to remind one of the busy past.

The big icebreaker had a chapel on board, and at one time there was quite a vogue among romantically-minded young couples of Irkutsk and the Trans-Baikal for having their wedding in it. In stormy weather (and you could get very rough crossings) a number of passengers always came in to pray—the more, the stormier. This used to annoy the wedding parties and led sometimes to unseemly brawls and even free fights. Irkutsk people cherish a story, which they declare to be true, of one of these rough-weather wed-

dings in the dark and crowded chapel saloon with every one, including the officiating priest; very dizzy, and a clamour of disputes going on, that resulted in the wrong young man being married because the bride felt so seasick that she did not open her eyes, and the groom was in a state of collapse, longing for a swift death rather than matrimony.

Before the construction of the Trans-Siberian railroad, one crossed the ice by sledge. There were specially trained horses for this traffic, accustomed to wearing shoes with long spikes in them. The camels of the tea caravans from China, too, used to wear such shoes for the crossing of the frozen lake.

During the days of the Russo-Japanese war, the little old villages of Listvinitchnaya and Mwisovaya, on opposite sides of the lake, had a hectic time, for almost all the comings and goings of men and munitions passed through. The confusion that prevailed was incredible. Champagne flowed like water. Bedizened vice flaunted itself at every turn. Graft was rampant. Each evening found every



one—generals, colonels, lieutenants, conscripts, Manchurian coolies, and even the numerous uniformed convicts who were drafted in to put a shoulder to the wheel of the chariot of Juggernaut—totting up the day's non-official earnings. Every one demanded, or expected, extra roubles, for doing his duty, nor were the extra roubles stinted, for one could always rely on getting them back from somebody else.

Champagne came out in sealed ammunition cars. Such cars, right up to the time of the recent World War, had a nice little coloured painting on each side, of a bursting shell—flame, smoke, and all—to deter the illiterate soldiery from treating them roughly. Near Irkutsk, an hour's journey west of Baikal, an entire train was lost, to the extreme perplexity of the railroad administration. It was given the "all clear" by a signal box one night and told to proceed and wait on a siding until morning. But when morning came it had vanished. The next signal box vowed that it had not seen it. What had happened was that the locomotive was run on a few miles and diverted, by a few feet of

specially laid rails, into a deep hole in the river. The "ammunition" cars were drawn by horses into the thick of the jumbled scores of sidings in a park of empty rolling-stock awaiting return to Russia and their identification marks changed. A ring of army officers who had been keeping a watchful eye on the consignment's progress ever since it had left Moscow, cleared about 100,000 roubles on the seven carloads of champagne that had been thus discreetly consigned to South Manchuria.

[Another theft of an entire train occurred quite recently in Poland. Composed of forty-two cars loaded with coal, it left Chorzaw, in Upper Silesia, on February 24, 1927, disappeared, and, despite an energetic search, could not be found. The police discovered, some weeks later, that the railway officials who despatched the train, forged freight notes. The coal was delivered to their accomplices in various towns, where it was sold, and the money shared.]

Hardly a week passed in those days without a bad explosion of munitions; or troops, stores, or a train going through the ice. The Japanese were

kept perfectly informed about affairs by the scores of intelligence officers, looking like Khalka Mongols, Buriats, and Manchus, who had been studying the requisite languages for years, in order to get jobs as coolies and transport workers when the long-foreseen struggle with Russia should at last materialize. All the same it was dangerous work and quite a number of them were detected and shot—and a number of unfortunate Mongols, Buriats, and Manchus as well.

The counter-espionage service of the Russians exercised much ingenuity in sniffing out suspects. Its agents used to make startling remarks in Japanese behind their back, while an accomplice, coming the other way, keenly noted their expression. It left paper parcels in their way, containing a vodka bottle with a Russian chemist's label indicating that the mixture was for poisoning rats. And it watched what the suspect spy did with that bottle. If really he were a humble Manchurian coolie it was ten thousand to one that he could not read what was written in ink below the familiar vodka label. It would be natural for

him either himself to take a swig at the stuff at an early opportunity or to sell or barter the bottle to an associate. That gave the spy some hard and quick thinking. It would be out of keeping with his rôle merely to throw the windfall away, or take it to the police station. Coolies don't behave that way when they find a full bottle of the kind that every coolie knows to contain the Russian peasant's most precious possession. It would not be natural to try to find a buyer at once; a coolie's first instinct would be to take the bottle back to his camp, or sleeping quarters, and make a deal with one of his friends. But there would be an unpleasant bother after selling to one's mess companions, for the evening meal, a bottle of what one had every reason to suppose was poison. The best course, probably, was to register restrained glee; to hail any associate one passed with a delighted: "Hullo, Chang! Look what I've found! Thassa stuff, eh, boy?"—and, to one's obvious chagrin and annoyance, to have the bottle slip out of one's hand over the next patch of hard ground one came to.

Still, it is one thing to dodge a trap after plenty of leisure for judicious reflection and quite another to do the right and natural thing on the spur of the moment.

The counter-espionage agents at Listvinitchnaya also used to leave confidential official papers around where a suspect would see them; such papers would give false information about points in the neighbouring forest where new ammunition dumps were being established. Then they would have the humble coolie watched and see if any of his evening strolls chanced to guide his feet in that direction. One of their most successful forms of trap, to test a suspected Japanese intelligence officer, was to let him overhear, by apparent chance, that his identity had been discovered and that he was going to be arrested on return to his sleeping quarters that evening, put against a wall, and shot. The scene was set with great care. The group of officers who thus casually mentioned his forthcoming fate took care not to see him or seem aware that he was within easy hearing.

An unpleasant dilemma! It must have needed

some nerve—to foolhardiness—to go home as usual to supper. One could not have had much of an appetite.

Though, in one instance, a contingent of one hundred and fifty infantry fell through the ice and were drowned, almost to a man, through crossing the lake too soon after the freeze-up, it was usually trains that met with this contretemps. Though parties were sent ahead to make frequent borings in the ice before a new set of rails was laid, the engineers had no means of foreseeing when a current of warm water from one of the numerous volcanic springs at the bottom would invisibly reduce the thickness beyond the safety point. In most cases there was just a violent crack, a great sag in the ice that filled at once with water, a lurch of the string of heavy cars, a snapping of rail bolts, a plunge—and the train and its locomotive had disappeared for ever.

But at least one little locomotive had the luck to go through before she came to the great depths. After a while the grapple hooks got busy. She was located and raised—and she is still on the job along

the Primorski railroad that runs along the coast between Leningrad and the Finnish frontier. She pulls passenger trains. I got a big surprise when, walking along the platform one day at Lakhta, I caught sight of the big, brightly polished brass plate on her side that announces her name, *Baikal*, and tells the world that she was fished up from the bottom of that distant inland sea of eastern Siberia, after having crashed through the ice in the days of the war with Japan.

A railroad on the ice was operating very usefully in the Kirin province of Manchuria last winter, linking Kirin city with a point thirty miles nearer to the Korean frontier. The track was laid over the ice of the Sungari river, which was thick enough to support a locomotive and a train of twenty laden freight cars.

At various points around the lake, deposits of a beautiful variety of lapis lazuli called baikalite have been found and for many years a mine of it has been yielding supplies, a few miles south of Kultuk. Baikalite is freer from blemishes than the Tibetan lapis lazuli to which it bears a resem-

blance. It occurs in veins along the contact lines of limestone and granite, and also as waterworn pebbles.

A large proportion of the scattered white population in the region between Baikal and the frontier of Manchuria is of exile descent. Many thousands of small farmers and ranchers—the backbone, indeed, of the western Trans-Baikal whites—are descendants of the *raskolnik* sect, hundreds of whom were sent to the far side of Siberia by the Empress Katharine. Their popes, or priests, were formerly induced to leave Orthodox monasteries back in Russia. The congregations would not let their minister possess a passport or identity papers on the ground that living in concealment and constant danger of arrest and persecution enabled him the better to maintain the state of mind of the early Christian missionaries who were persecuted by the Roman authorities.

The island of Olkhon, midway up the lake, on the west side, is very poor in animal and vegetable life, found Kulakov; its forests consist chiefly of red and white pine, Scots fir, larch, birch, aspen,



and poplar. On the eastern side the trees form only small thickets. On the slopes of the hills the flora resembles that of the steppes of Mongolia and Trans-Baikalia, though it has some affinity with the vegetation of the tundras of the extreme north. Many forms appear on Olkhon which are found in Trans-Baikalia but not on the western side of the lake. This lends strong support to the theory that before the volcanic upheaval that produced the great gash in the earth's crust, which, filling with water, became Lake Baikal, the Angara flowed *west* of the island. In the woods roam wolves, roe-deer, foxes and polecats.

Olkhon, in the Buriat tongue, signifies dry—not in the Volstead sense, for the islanders have plenty of *tarasun*, *kvas*, and vodka, but because of the unusually scanty annual rain- and snow-fall. The soil is so dry that agriculture is out of the question, except at a few spots, and grazing pasture scarce. Fishing and sealing are the main support of the population, which is dwindling. But here, as in the Minusinsk country in the upper watershed of the Yenisei, there was a large pre-

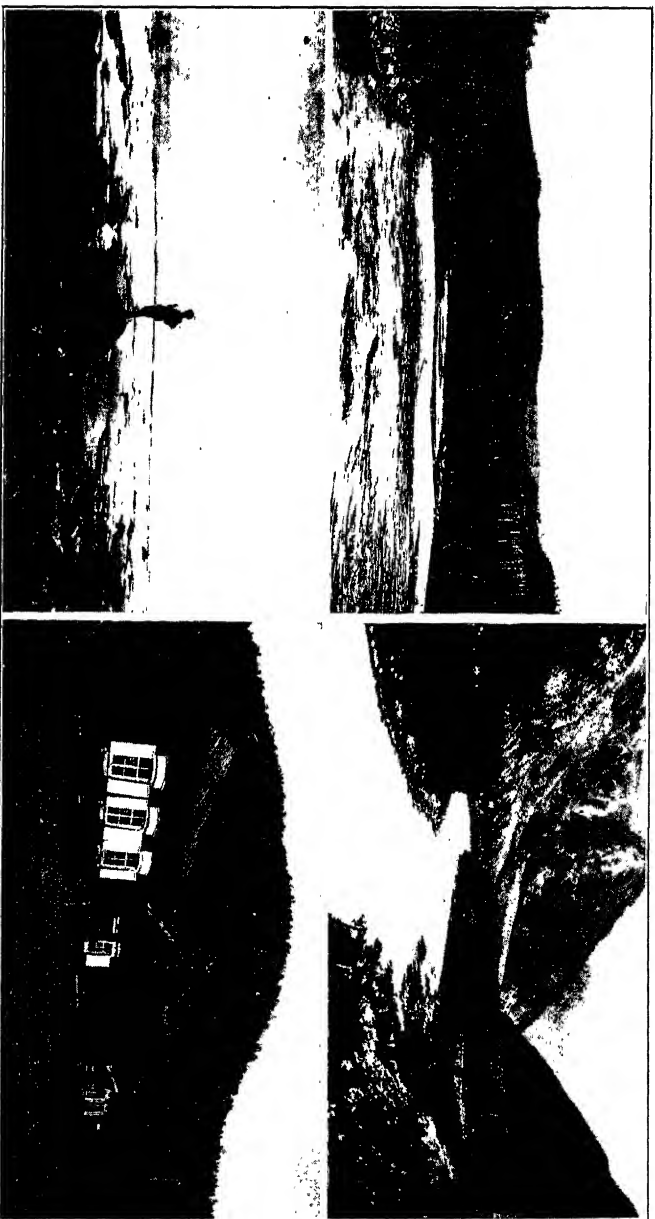
historic population which has vanished without leaving any written or traditional records. If mankind originated, as the world's most eminent palæontologists suspect, in Central Asia, the archæological research to be undertaken in the course of investigating human origins will entail much more extensive excavations on Olkhon and around Minusinsk than have yet been tackled. The remains of many tombs, walls, and pottery utensils have already been found in the soil of Olkhon, and the bones of both human beings and domesticated cattle.

The existence of the island was first officially reported to Muscovy after the visit of the Cossack leader Ivanov, accompanied by seventy-five of his men, in 1643. Georgi was the first scientist to examine it. The people consist of nomad Buriats, with the exception of the inhabitants of three small villages, whose parents were nominally converted to Christianity, many marrying Russian women. The nomads live in winter and summer encampments, moving to or fro each May and October, to give the grass time to grow again for a

hay harvest. The islanders are old-fashioned in their dress, which is usually made of sheepskin, and in their expressions of greeting to each other and their ways of entertaining guests. They are very hospitable and kindly to strangers. Their women-folk, too, are more noticeably treated as inferiors, as was the way in the old days.

Polygamy is rife among them, and women are accounted too low in the human scale to approach certain holy places, which may be visited, however, by any small boys. But the wives have the consolation of knowing that the prices that are charged for them by their fathers (the equivalent of about half a year's income of a small family) is considered outrageously high, by the unmarried men—who pay it, nevertheless, under protest. Another advantage of being the father of an Olkhon bride is that the wedding guests have been trained, by centuries of custom, to bring their own drinks to the feast, instead of making heartbreaking inroads on his cellar.

The system of land tenure has many interesting features. No "capitalism" is permitted, in the sense



*Upper left:* THE SORT OF RIVER WHERE GOLD IS FOUND IN THE NORTH; *upper right:* ONE OF THE FINE VALLEYS OF THE ALTAI COUNTRY. RIVER KATUNI IN FOREGROUND; *lower left:* WHERE THE JUNE ICE-PACKS COME INSHORE ON THE EAST COAST OF BAIKAL. AUTHOR, ON MORaine BOULDER, IN FOREGROUND; *lower right:* LISTVENTICHNAYA, WHERE THE ICEBREAKER "BAIKAL" WAS PUT TOGETHER.



*Upper left: A PICTURESQUE LITTLE BAY ON BAIKAL; upper right: THE ICEBREAKER "BAIKAL" LEAVING THE LOG KEY AT TANKHAI; lower left: THE KHOBOT ROCK ON LAKE BAIKAL; lower right: THE VERGE OF BAIKAL NEAR LISTVENTCHNAYA.*

of one man being allowed to get so much land and cattle into his power that he is able to dominate the interests of less propertied men. The supreme authority (subject, of course, to the Russian authorities, who do not interfere so long as the taxes are paid and the rights of the whites are not affected) is the voice of the majority, as expressed at periodically convened gatherings of the men-folk of the local communities. That may be one of the fifty-seven varieties of socialism. But certain individualistic investments are countenanced and are as secure as any holding of our chief stocks and bonds; these take the form of turning over one's land and cattle, as one gets on in years, to some energetic young fellow, who feels capable of tackling more work than is involved in looking after his own share, and receiving, in return, a dividend of food, clothing, fuel, and shelter without having to go on working for it. That sounds a rather vague dividend, but as nobody is out to, or able to, make a fortune by bleeding his neighbours, and as needs are so unexacting that food is just food, clothes just clothes, fuel just fuel, and

shelter just shelter; and, moreover, as every one realizes that old age must be made safe for democracy, because, barring accidents, it is the common lot, the system works pretty well. The trouble will come, naturally, when the people have heard about civilization and realized that it is up to them to sell their liberty for the privilege of filling their homes with junk, buying tin Lizzies, and dressing more expensively than the family next door.

## *Chapter 5*

### SIBERIA'S INDIANS

The American Indians are descendants of the "Indians" of Siberia. They came over the strip of land that joined the Siberian side of the Bering Strait to Alaska some tens of thousands of years ago. With them, or before them, came the great hairy mammoths of the Old World. Major O. S. McCleary, who has been digging up ancient Indian remains along the valley of the Columbia river, has found quantities of remarkable objects made of stone by those early arrivals, among them being bowls ornamented with a peculiar sort of grooving that depicts the human face and hands, the sun, and various birds, animals, and fishes.

In some quarters it has been thought that these objects indicate the descent of the prehistoric Columbian Indians from the Incas of Peru, who, too, were skilled stone-cutters. But on my desk stands a wooden jar, with a lid, hollowed out of a



slice of the limb of a tree, that is carved with just the same style of design. It did not come from the jungles of South America. It came from the hut of an old "Indian" woman in the middle of the Siberian province of Yakutsk. I myself noticed it on a shelf and bought it from her. . . .

The early Siberians also spread westward and were the original Russians, Finns, and Esthonians. But the westernmost pioneers, as the centuries passed, blended with the races of western Europe and became the victims, in Hungary, Poland, and Finland, of successive waves of invasion from what history terms the Mongol, or Tartar, hordes. Queer things happened to some of these hordes. Up in northeast Siberia, for instance, I found the Yakuts using many words that are practically Turkish. . . .

However, after a while, the tide turned the other way, and, just before the arrival of Columbus in America, the Muscovites began to send their own hordes back toward the rising sun. They were better-equipped and much smaller hordes, with definite aims. They left the women and children,

and flocks and herds, at home. The east-bound pioneers were not nomad cattle herders moving vaguely along toward richer pastures, but gangs of cut-throat Cossacks, travelling light and out for furs. Throughout the 1600's these gangs came and went. It is quite possible that it was their ruthlessness that cowed the natives into the docility that has been so remarkable a characteristic of them for a century or more. Then, in the 1700's, came the farming settlers and the first exploring men of science.

Now let us first glance at the Siberian "Indians" as a whole. (It must be clearly understood that none of them have ever seen India, but as the term is applied to every swarthy aborigine from Hudson's Bay to Patagonia, it should also be available for the similarly jungle-and-forest-dwelling races of northern Asia.) It is impossible to tell you how many kinds there are, because opinions differ on exactly where their lines of divergence mark them off from certain other aggregations. Many of them blend into one another, even using various languages in common. Others are as clearly dis-

tinct as, say, Swedes and Irishmen. You cannot call them nations because they have no frontiers, or ruling hierarchies, or idea of the fellow on the other side of the river being an inferior being, to be armed against, scorned, attacked, and plundered, on account of his speaking another tongue. Some, but not all, have tribal organizations, but most of these have very little effect on a man's daily routine, though they look imposing on paper. Essentially the Siberians are just races—sets of people with a common ancestry, language, set of traditional domestic customs, and supernatural beliefs, and a clearly realized community of interests. *You* would not consider them civilized, for they think that our scheme of life is, in essential respects, quite horrible.

No Siberian Indian would refuse to share his supper and sleeping hut with any poor person who happened to be in need of food and shelter. You should have seen the amazement of Tunguses when I explained to them that if one of our men has lots of superfluous food he can never eat and lots of superfluous clothes that he can never wear, and

lots of warm rooms, he employs other men to beat off the needy! The Siberian Indian does not aspire to acquiring power by making as many other men as possible work for his aggrandizement. He is on the same terms with his fellows as you are with your own friends when you are camping in the woods.

According to some reckonings there are more than one hundred and fifty races of natives, but I prefer to accept Patkanov's grouping, which reduces that number considerably. Owing to the intervention of the World War and other disturbances, no census figures are available since those of 1897, but the latter indicate pretty accurately the relative numbers, and how greatly they vary. [A census of all the Russian domains, including Siberia, was taken in the few weeks following December 17, 1926, but it will be a long time before the results are published.]

Buriats .....	288,599
Chuyants .....	453
Yakuts .....	226,739
Orokhs .....	749

## 104 TIGERS, GOLD, AND WITCH-DOCTORS

Eleuts .....	15
Tunguses .....	62,068
Tchuktches .....	about 11,000
Solons .....	15
Golds .....	5,016
Yenisei Ostiaks .....	988
Sakhalin and Yezo Ainus .....	1,457
Voguls .....	7,476
Koriaks .....	7,335
Samoyedes .....	12,502
Kamchatdals .....	2,805
Ugrian Ostiaks .....	17,221
Eskimos .....	1,307

When the officials who took the census of the Tchuktches were asked to explain the "about" that prefaced their figures, they explained that although the Tchuktche territory (the northeast corner of Asia) was coloured Russian on the map, the Tchuktches were a tough and truculent folk, who had, unfortunately, not heard of maps, and said very rude things about Russians in general and the tsar in particular. Their remoteness, and a century or so of occasional association with "hard-boiled" whalers and fur poachers, has rendered

them practically independent. They do not go wild, as Apaches and Sioux used to, when a group of white men appear, but they are an ugly crew, and many whites have mysteriously disappeared while in their country.

Two theories as to the origin of the Eskimos have been put forward of late as the result of excavations in Central France, and on two little islands halfway across the Bering Strait, by Canadian archæologists. Ethnologically, the Eskimos are in a peculiarly interesting position, because they constitute, today, a kind of racial bridge between northeast Asia and northwest America. The excavators in the Dordogne are reported to have been greatly impressed by the similarity between the measurements of the palæolithic skulls they dug up, and the various domestic and hunting implements of reindeer bone and antler, and stone, and those of the modern Eskimo, and to consider that these prehistoric Dordogners followed the receding edge of the ice cap of Europe northward and eastward, across Arctic Europe and Siberia; until, in the course of thousands of years of steady ex-

pansion, they came to Alaska and spread eastward, over Canada and Greenland.

The Bering excavator was Mr. Jenness, chief of the Division of Anthropology at Ottawa of the Canadian government. Out on the Diomedé Isles, which are rocky peaks of submerged mountains, he found needle cases and harpoon heads that he believes to be of Eskimo manufacture and much more than two thousand years old. Glass beads which he discovered he declared to be "undoubtedly European," and to have reached the isles before the Russians or other whites; and he found Chinese turquoise beads, some covered with etchings. Mr. Jenness expressed himself as of the opinion that the Diomedé excavations showed that the Bering Strait was the gateway by which the population of the New World entered.

The last census showed slightly under a million Siberian Indians, all told, and about five million persons of Russian birth or descent.

There is a lot of intermarrying, which complicates the ethnological position. Nomadic folk for the most part, the Indians live by hunting, fishing,

and fur-trapping, and by tending their flocks and herds. One thing that particularly struck me, everywhere I went, was the love of freedom and the life of prairie, river, and forest that keeps them away from the big towns of the white man, despite the lure of easy money to be picked up there. They do not mind driving wagons, farming, lumbering, or so forth; but that they do on terms of equality with the whites. And there is an utter absence of the arrogance and contempt to which the North American Indian is treated. They worship manifestations of nature, as expounded by their *Shamans*, or witch-doctors. Worship is the conventional word, but there is very little, if any, adoration about religion in the Siberian forests. The long and the short of it is that the Indians are kept thoroughly uneasy about what unkindly disposed spirits may do to them and desirous of warding off trouble by taking the *Shaman's* advice. In the course of scores of centuries the *Shamans* have developed interesting, but extraordinarily complicated, systems of bogey stories about good and evil spirits, which are the main topic of conversa-



tion with the children during the several hours a day spent crouching over the flickering fire throughout the long winter months. As a result they feel themselves perpetually surrounded and interfered with by invisible beings all their life. Whatever happens—a big catch of fish or not a bite, a sable in the trap, the birth of twins, toothache or a fair wind across the lake—is due to direct supernatural intervention.

Most of the races, especially the smaller ones, are dying out, largely owing to accidents caused by over-indulgence in vodka, and to not having developed immunity to the contagious diseases brought by the white man. Venereal disease, too, claims a great number of victims; indeed it is quite rare to see an Indian who is not obviously suffering from some form of skin trouble, and travellers would be well advised never to drink from any but their own cups. The three most populous races, the Yakuts, Buriats, and Tunguses, are among those that are holding their own. The Yakuts, indeed, who live in the great watershed of the river Lena, in northeast Siberia, are actually

absorbing Russians. When a Russian marries a Yakut woman, the family tends to become Yakut in the second generation.

The faces of Siberian Indians show every possible blend of the Chinese, the Eskimo, and the Red Indian. Some races of them look almost entirely Chinese, or Eskimo, or Indian.

In the country around Baikal dwell the Buriats, most prosperous and energetic of the Siberian races. They have the luck to live right athwart the Trans-Siberian railway, within easy reach everywhere of Irkutsk, a city of more than 100,000 persons. This gives them a ready market for their horses, cattle, and sheep, and increases their prosperity. There are Russian doctors within a day or two's journey of the remotest of them, to cope with sudden epidemics. It has become fashionable among the owners of most of the big herds of animals to send their children to school at Irkutsk, or Tchita, Verknie Udinsk, and Troitskosavsk. The great majority of Buriats are no longer nomadic, but live in villages of log houses and shacks, like the Russians.

The Buriats are a strange race. There are more Dr. Jekylls and Mr. Hydes among them than among most peoples. Shown over one of the colleges of Irkutsk in the morning, you may pause to chat with some neatly uniformed student whom you interrupt in his reading of advanced German philosophy or in making a biological analysis of the muscles of a goat's leg. Ere night-fall you may meet him, a few leagues out in the hills, participating in a ceremonial sacrifice of horses, or some wild orgy of chant and dance and votive offering, presided over by a wild-eyed maniacal witch-doctor. For though the Russian Orthodox Church in the north, and Buddhist missionaries in the south, have been gaining a number of adherents, the majority of the Buriats have remained in the faith of their fathers, the propitiation of, and intercession to, the capricious spirits of the forest and lake and prairie. The prosperous families—and many are rich, though they subsist mainly on a monotonous diet of mutton, bread, and tea—own two dwellings. The winter they spend in a Russian-style log house, with white

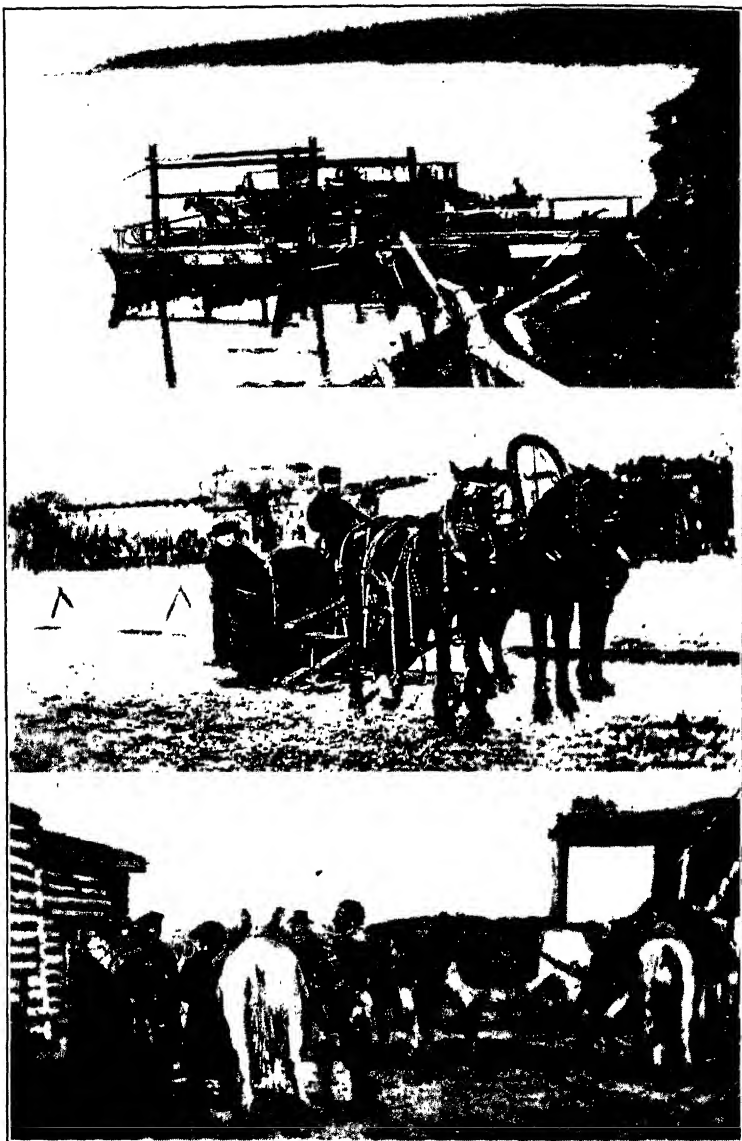
men's furniture. Their summer house, out on the prairie, is an eight-sided replica of their poorer folks' felt *auls*. An *aul* is like a big brown or black bowl, lying upside down on the grass. It is a skeleton of light wooden framework, covered with coarse felt—the Siberian Indian's version, in fact, of his American cousin's wigwam. In accordance with pagan ritualistic tradition, the door in this wooden *aul* faces south. The rooms of the interior of this wooden wigwam are shaped like the quarters of an orange and are separated merely by curtains. In the middle of the wooden floor, which is raised about eighteen inches from the ground, is the big fireplace, the smoke passing out—eventually—through a large hole directly overhead in the roof. Around the rim of this hearth gathers the family. As might be expected in a nation living almost exclusively by raising cattle and horses, Buriat animals were very cheap until the outbreak of the World War. A cow cost \$15, a sheep \$2.50, a horse \$20 or \$25, a goat \$1.50, and a hog \$7. A strong camel could be obtained from them for about \$50. Now, however, prices are about double

those quoted. You have to step warily in accepting a Buriat's hospitality, for you will not like some of the food and drink you will be offered—what I used to call horse-tail tea, for instance. A woman sets an iron kettle over the fire, fills it with water, adds a pinch or two of caked bullock blood and tea dust, and a little salt, and stirs it vigorously with a horse's tail. When it boils, she pours it into another vessel, again stirring with the horse's tail. This caudal appendage is not kept especially for making tea, it is a general scrub brush and broom for any sort of use in the *aul*. A paste of meal and butter, from a smelly goatskin sewn up at the knees, is added, and thick cream in which you notice plenty of hairs and dead flies. After having been boiled for ten minutes, the mess is set aside to cool and then served in wooden bowls. Even the well-to-do, moreover, do not entertain the least objection to a savoury dish of meat on account of the beast's having been found mysteriously dead!

The Buriat and his *tarasun* are comparable to the Scot and his whisky. It is a revelation to you to see what can be done with ordinary milk; for



*Upper left: A TCHUKTCHE YOUNGSTER IN HIS WARM WINTER SUIT; upper right: A LAMUT INDIAN; lower left: A TCHUKTCHE INDIAN; lower right: A TCHUKTCHE MATRON AND HER CHILD.*



*Top:* A SELENGA RIVER FERRY; *center:* A TROIKA SLEDGE;  
*bottom:* THE SUMMER POST GOING OUT FROM VERKHOYANSK,  
THE COLDEST AND ONE OF THE REMOTEST VILLAGES IN THE

*tarasun*, the highly alcoholic colourless liquid that keeps the Buriat in good spirits, in more senses than one, is just a distillation of milk, made in primitive household stills. When a wedding or a party is in the offing the family re-distills the three or four barrels which it always has handy—re-distills it twice, or thrice. But, for all that, the Buriat takes his liquor like a gentleman. He will tackle enough *tarasun* to prostrate three hooch-hardened hillmen of Tennessee, and then pick up his bow and a sheaf of arrows, vault on to his shaggy little horse's back, and shoot—and hit!—hares from the saddle as he passes them at a gallop.

In certain circumstances the Buriats are actually cannibals, for they make a ceremonial meal of a part of the human body.

Religious superstition is much more closely interwoven with the everyday life of the Buriat than with that of white races. His gods, called *burkhans*, and the invisible world of spirits, are very near and real to him. Mysterious links with the unseen, called *ongons*, enter intimately into his domestic ritual. A typical *ongon* consists of a small



box with a sliding lid, containing a narrow strip or two of silk, to which are sewn several crude little metal images, tiny metal men and women in profile, and three or four dried and wizened skins of small animals. "House" *ongons* are hung high up in the corner of the shack or *aul*. That, undoubtedly, was the pagan origin of the modern Russian custom of hanging a little *ikon* (holy picture or model metal shrine) on the wall in the corner of every room in the house. Property *ongons* are affixed to a post of the sheds in the stockaded yard. Out on open wind-swept tracts of steppe, far from any habitation, one encounters clusters of tall posts with, across the top of each, projecting over the east side, like half a roof, a small board. Under this roof is a slot in the post, protected by a sliding cover. Inside the slot is the field *ongon*, a collection of charms rather similar to those in and around the house. When a man marries and establishes a home of his own, he has to set up, away in the wilderness, in one of these lonely clusters of pagan shrines, a post of his own. At this ceremony, when a set of charms is placed in the post, a witch-doctor

officiates. At the death of a man, his *ongons* are taken from the pillar, off into a forest glade, there to be hung high on a tree until, with the passing of years, they fall to pieces.

Strange and eerie it was to encounter one of these forest *ongons*. My horse was stumbling among the tangled creepers, and mossy limbs and trunks of fallen trees that lay hidden by the grass and low undergrowth, one afternoon in May, when suddenly I caught sight of what, had I been in England or America, I should have said was a nesting box, put up by a lover of birds. A beam of sunshine, slanting down through a gap in the dense foliage, struck the side of the fir trunk with the intensity of a searchlight.

I slackened rein and let the horse graze. And, as I looked up at this exiled box of the household charms of an unnamed man, who had been, and now was not, a yellow butterfly came flickering down the sunbeam, and perched on the box. Once or twice, it opened and closed its wings. Then it rose, and, a moment later, the sinister gloom of the forest had swallowed it up. . . .

Bad luck, and even disaster, is believed to attend the dead man's family if the man carrying this *ongon* from the cluster of posts to the last resting-place in the forest once looks back.

Sacred groves and trees are a feature of the Buriat country and make one very uneasy about chopping down a tree for fuel, the framework of a tent, or any other purpose. There have been some ugly incidents between Russian surveyors and these Indians owing to ignorance of the local significance attached to certain trees. In fact, no traveller should lay axe to a tree until he has first been assured by the nearest settlement of resident natives that there is no objection to his doing so. It goes without saying that he should not camp in a sacred grove or anywhere near a cluster of field *ongon* posts, tether his horse to an *ongon* post or tree, or tamper with the contents of the little boxes. As I point out elsewhere, good manners are as desirable when visiting the holy places of primitive peoples, in the wilderness, as in a cathedral or cemetery of our own. It is much better, on sighting a collection of *ongons* that you wish to visit,

to find natives who will show them to you, rather than to ride straight up to them. News spreads quickly and surely among the Siberian Indians, and it is extremely unhealthy to risk a reputation for sacrilege getting a start on you—there are so many “accidents” that might put an end to your days, out there.

Practically every isolated and prominent tree in a bare expanse of steppe is held to be the home of a lesser *burkhan*. Soon after a witch-doctor dies, one of his friends falls into a trance—struck by an invisible thunderbolt launched by the gods—and when he recovers he announces that the dead priest's spirit has revealed to him the spot in which it wishes to rest. The body is burned and the ashes placed in a hole cut in one of the largest trees in the appointed part of the forest. Thenceforth the spot is holy.

These sacred groves are held in the greatest reverence. No tree there may be cut down, nor may dead branches be broken off. Even the grass carpeting the ground, rich and tempting crop though it be, may not be mown. When a Buriat

passes by he dismounts and sprinkles on the ground, near by, a few drops of *tarasun*, or a few shreds of tobacco, thus standing treat in case the gods or the spirit of the witch-doctor may care to drink or to smoke.

Shamanism, probably, in one form or another, was the very earliest religion in the world, for it is the faith of the people living in and around the region of north central Asia in which humanity originated. It is the religion of the Siberian Indians all the way from the Urals to the gateway of Manchuria, with but slight changes of ritual.

The universe, to these roving children of forest and prairie, consists of a number of layers, or strata, separated by intermediate slices of space or matter. The seven upper layers constitute the kingdom of light and the seven lower layers the kingdom of darkness. The surface of the earth is flat and lies between the two groups. The good spirits dwell above, the evil ones below. In the very highest layer, the seventh heaven, reigns the great Delquen Sagan, otherwise known as Esege Malan, Tangara, or Ai-Toion. He is perfect, morally, and

meddles very little in the base affairs of earth. Down in the nethermost pit lives Erlik Khan, the Black One.

The human race, in the philosophy of Shamanism, constitutes the plaything of the spirits of dead men. The witch-doctor, being gifted with second sight, is aware of what is going on in the invisible world, and can pretty well always avert, or alleviate, catastrophe, by appeasing the evil spirits and by appealing, in extreme cases, to a benevolent *burkhan*, for there are a whole hierarchy of lesser gods.

Among the Buriats, Esege Malan himself is so holy that no pictures or images are ever made of him. Below him live the ninety-and-nine *tengeri*, each with his own name. *Tengeri* are spirits aloft, high up in the sky; the Buriat word for sky, too, is *tengeri*. So perhaps "sky spirits" is the best name for them. There are two groups. Those in the western sky are called white *tengeri*; there are fifty-five of them, and they are friends of man. The forty-four in the eastern sky are black *tengeri*, and they delight in making troubles for

man; sickness and death are due to them. The black *tengeri* seceded from the main body long ago after relations with the whites had become strained. The white *tengeri* cannot spare all their time for paying heed to the affairs of mankind, but frequently they open the doors of the sky and look down on the human race.

An old man at Zhirimskaya told me how one knew when the door was being opened. I was sitting with him late one afternoon, when the clouds were driving across the western sky. He pointed across the prairie to where, a few miles away, a great radiant shaft of light came slanting down from the hidden sun, through a rift. "The white *tengeri* are looking from the sky!" he said. A minute or two later, another rift opened, flooding our village with rosy radiance. My companion, and every one of the four or five other Buriats in sight, turned and faced the point in the sky whence the shaft of light was coming, their lips moving in prayer. A week later a Buriat who was driving me turned round suddenly and pointed excitedly toward another "door-opening" in the west, just before sunset. He reined in the horse,

with a jerk, and prayed. Prayer, at such moments, is considered particularly likely to be answered.

White *tengeri* themselves do not come down to earth, to help man. They send *aides-de-camp* called *khats*, or *burkhans*, to do what is necessary. Many of these are known by name, so frequently are they sent on such missions, and are invoked by the witch-doctors at the spiritualistic séances over which they preside. The black *tengeri*, too, send subordinates down to earth, on malicious missions. Black *khats* and white *khats* never meet under a flag of truce, to discuss affairs, but employ negotiators called *ilshi*. Then there are *zayans*, who are spirits of ancestors, or guardian spirits of anything from a mountain to a disease; and *bokholdoy*s which are the part of the human soul which is not called to judgment but goes on living its life on earth as hitherto—but invisibly. Then there are *adas*, spirits of souls of childless women. *Adas* are always one-eyed. Every dog or cat that is blind in one eye is strongly suspected of being a reincarnated *ada*.

The witch-doctors, as you may well understand, have their hands full with their task of acting as



intermediaries between mankind and this array of invisible interferers with our destinies. They are queer folk, absent-minded in the material routine of life, always preoccupied with visions. They are frequently hypnotists of no little skill, blunting the acuteness of observation of their audience by monotonous chant and noisy reiteration of invocation, until it is very susceptible to mob suggestion, and then transfixing one person after another with glaring eyes that seem, as the natives put it, "to jump out of their face." They are experts in performing numerous conjuring tricks that are accepted as supernatural magic. Often they are ventriloquists.

The witch-doctors do not hold regular services, or have churches or temples; nor do they wear a uniform or regalia of any sort except on special occasions. But on those special occasions they wear costumes that are as remarkable as any of those of witch-doctors of New Guinea or the Congo, and as they sway and dance and work themselves up into a frenzy they make "music" with extraordinary instruments.

## *Chapter 6*

### WITCH-DOCTORS AT WORK

Most religions stand right out in the sunshine, and their adherents are ready to give one the fullest statistical information about themselves. The Shamanists, however, behave as though they are members of a secret society. They do not go to the length of punishing members who reveal details of their beliefs, behaviour and services, nor in most cases, do they assault a white man who, as unostentatiously as possible, makes a study of them. But they do avoid the notice of whites as much as possible, meeting, when a service has been planned, at a rendezvous known only to themselves, and out of the way of the whites.

As a result the knowledge that one can obtain of them, even when travelling thousands of miles through their midst, is very far from complete. Seeking such information is a baffling game. It reminded me of the days when, as a youngster, I

played "blind man" in games of blindman's buff. One groped, one listened, one heard subdued whisperings, rustlings, light quick footfalls. One knew the room was full of children. One pounced—but one's prey often eluded one. There is no pan-Siberian organization of Shamanism; not even, so far as I could ascertain, any organization in each race. Among the smaller races, of course, consisting of only a few score, or hundred, souls, there are not many witch-doctors, and a rough-and-ready scale of merit, based on age, magic accomplishments, and personality, puts each one in a more or less definite niche in the community. But among the big races no one knows even how many witch-doctors there are. They practise independently, knowing little, and caring less, about the practitioners outside their own "parishes." Each witch-doctor certainly is aware of the two or three practitioners to the north, to the south, to the east, and to the west, and has them sized up in his mind. But it is highly doubtful if any of these strange fellows has the remotest idea of his co-religionists' activities a few hundred miles away;

and a witch-doctor in the forests of the Altai has no more knowledge of witch-doctoring news up in the forests of Yakutsk than the Man in the Moon.

Some of the most revealing glimpses of their activities have been obtained by men of education who have been exiled to remote parts of Siberia, as political suspects, and after living for years in little native settlements, have come to be accepted by their neighbours as folks like themselves and allowed to see what no casual stranger could observe.

One of the most fortunate eye-witnesses of the amazing spectacle of a witch-doctor's frenzy was a Pole named Sieroszievski, who spent twelve years up in the wilds of Yakutsk. This is what happens:

A sick person has to be healed. Nothing can be done in the daytime. As in Africa and New Guinea, the witch-doctor realizes that he can get his effects much better at night. So when he turns up he is ushered to the raised seat (a sort of dais or ottoman) called the *bilirik*, which corresponds to our "best parlour chair." On this he spreads the

white mare-skin rug that he brings with him, and reclines on his side; the women of the household bring him something to eat and drink. . . . The day wanes.

When the sun sets and the dusk of evening approaches, all preparations for the ceremony in the *yurta* (shack or sod-walled hut) are hurriedly completed: the floor is swept, the firewood broken, and a better supper than usual is prepared. Neighbours begin to arrive. They squat down along the floor by the wall, talking in undertones and without making animated gestures. In the north of Yakutsk the host chooses the best lachets and makes a loop of them, which is put around the witch-doctor's shoulders; the end of the cord is held during the dance by one of the company, to avert the risk of evil spirits carrying him off. Then comes supper, and, that disposed of, people squat along by the wall again, doing nothing. The witch-doctor, sitting now on the edge of the dais, slowly unbraids his long hair; he mutters mysterious orders. Sometimes he has a violent spell of nervous hiccoughing that shakes his whole body. His gaze

becomes fixed, usually on the flickering fire. The fire goes down, and no more fuel is flung on it. The hut becomes darker. Voices are hushed to a whisper. The host announces that if any one wishes to go out, he or she must do so at once, for soon the door will be barred, and then no one will be allowed to enter or to leave. Slowly the witch-doctor takes off his coat and puts on his ceremonial robe. A pipe of tobacco is handed to him; for some minutes he smokes, inhaling the smoke. His hic-cough is louder. He shudders violently. His head droops. His eyes are half closed. The white mare rug is now spread in the middle of the hut. The witch-doctor asks for a bowl of cold water, and, having taken it into his mouth, slowly stretches out his hand for his drum that has been prepared for him. He steps to the middle of the hut, and dropping on his right knee, makes a solemn bow to each of the four corners of the world, simultaneously spitting out little jets of the water which he has been holding in his mouth. . . . There is silence. A handful of white horsehair is tossed on the fire, extinguishing all flickerings. By the glow

of the embers the still, looming shape of the witch-doctor is just visible. His head is bent; his big drum is clutched to his breast. He is facing the south, and south, too, is facing the neck of the mare-skin rug on which he is squatting. The embers cease to glow. It is quite dark. The people wait with bated breath. Only the confused mutterings and hiccoughs of the witch-doctor can be heard; and even these die away.

Suddenly a loud yawn breaks the stillness, followed by the piercing cry of a falcon, or the plaintive mew of a gull. Then all is still again. . . . The gentle roll of the drum, like the humming of a gnat, announces that the witch-doctor has begun to play. At first the music is soft, tender, and delicate, then loud and menacing, like the roar of a rising storm. Louder and louder it grows, and one seems to hear wild shouts rending the air. The crow calls, the grebe laughs, the sea gulls mew, snipe whistle, and eagles scream. The music swells and rises to the highest pitch; the beating of the drum becomes more and more vigorous. Small bells clang; it is not a storm—it is a veritable cascade

of sounds, fit to overwhelm all listeners. . . . Abruptly it breaks off. . . . There are one or two loud beats on the drum, which, up till now held aloft, drops to the witch-doctor's knees. A pause. Then the mosquito-like hum of the drum recommences. The magician now begins to chant and one catches such snatches of fervent invocation as: "O mighty bull of the earth! I, the mighty bull, bellow! I, the horse of the steppes, neigh! I, the man set above all other beings! I, the man most gifted of all! I, the man created by the all-powerful master! Horse of the steppes, appear and teach me! Enchanted bull of the earth, appear and speak to me! Powerful master, give me thy commands! All of you who will go with me, give heed with your ears! Those whom I command not, follow me not! Approach not nearer than is permitted! Look intently! Pay heed! Have a care! Look heedfully! Do this, all of you—all together—all, however many you may be! Thou of the left side, O lady with thy staff, if anything be done amiss, if I take not the right path, I entreat you, put me right! Command! Show me my errors and



my path, O mother of mine! Wing thy free flight! Souls of the sun, mothers of the sun, living in the south, in the nine wooded hills, ye who shall be jealous! I adjure you all—let them stay! Let your three shadows stand high! In the east, on your mountain, lord, grandsire of mine, great of power and sturdy of neck, be thou with me! And thou, grey-bearded wizard, I ask thee: with all my dreams, with all, comply! Grant all my prayers! Heed all! Fulfil all! All heed! All fulfil!”

After these incoherent exclamations, the witch-doctor talks to his own ancestral spirit, and others. He has to call them by beating his drum. Sometimes they take a lot of calling; sometimes they come with such surprising speed that he falls down with astonishment. If he falls on his back it is a bad omen.

“When his ancestral spirit appears,” continues Sieroszievski, “the witch-doctor arises and begins to leap and dance, at first on the mare-skin rug, and then, as his movements become more animated, out on the floor of the hut. Wood is quickly flung on the fire and fanned to flame. He dances,

sings, and beats the drum without pause, leaps about in a frenzied manner, facing now the south, now the west, now the east. Those holding him by the leather thongs sometimes find it very hard to maintain their hold. In the southern territory, however, he dances without this leash. Indeed he often puts aside his drum, the better to be able to dance without restraint. His head is bowed. His eyes are half shut. His hair is tumbled and lies in lank disorder on his perspiring face. His mouth is contorted. Spittle streams down his chin. Often he foams. He moves round the hut, advancing and retreating, beating the drum. He shakes his clanking robe and seems to become more and more maniacal, intoxicated with noise and exertion. His fury rises and falls like a wave. Sometimes it lulls for a little. Then, holding his drum high above his head, he solemnly chants a prayer and summons a spirit. . . . At last he knows all that he wishes to. He has become acquainted with the cause of the disease with which he has been striving, and he is now assured of the help of the spirits whose aid he has been invoking. Circling about in

his dance, chanting and drumming, he draws near to the sufferer. With renewed warnings, he drives away the cause of the trouble by scaring it, or by pretending to suck the pain from the afflicted part. Returning to the middle of the hut, he spits out the pain, or breathes it out and blows it away. He ascertains what sacrifice is to be made to the powerful spirit for having thus rudely treated the latter's subordinate spirit which was sent to cause the illness. Then, shading his eyes with his cupped hands, the better to see into shadowy spots, he peers attentively into every corner of the hut. When he notices any spirit of suspicious aspect lurking there, he beats the drum, makes menacing gestures, and dances, to scare it into taking flight. At last he is satisfied that the place is free of lurking evil spirits; the sacrifice is accepted, his prayers have been answered, the patient is on the way to recovery.

One of the many curious things about the witch-doctors of Siberia is that they are often women; claims are made by devout Shamanists that many witch-doctors can change their sex when-

ever they like. Some of the most eminent ethnologists who have delved deeply into Shamanistic theory and practice believe, moreover, that originally all the witch-doctors were women. Women witch-doctors are considered by the Yakuts to excel in tracing lost property, curing the weak-minded, and predicting what the future holds in store. They are poor ventriloquists, however, and in most troubles and perplexities they are not called upon to officiate if a male wizard's services are available.

The witch-doctor's ceremonial attire usually consists of a leather smock or robe, a queer cap, and a mask. This mask is not a weird and terrifying conception, like the feather masks of certain South Sea Islanders, and the wooden ones to be found in Africa, New Guinea, and Central Asia. It is usually a kind of cowl, pierced with eye-holes, and sometimes decorated with owl feathers. On the robe are stitched large numbers of discs and strips of iron, which have to be made by a specially approved blacksmith. Sometimes to the bits of clanking and jingling iron are added num-

bers of little bells and doll-like images, and even iron figures of horses, fishes, and birds. I have been shown by Russian and Siberian ethnologists who had managed, with much guile and even more good luck, to secure them, more than half the few witch-doctors' robes that have been obtained from the natives, and I found hardly two alike. On some of them the assortment of metal oddments, each with an involved story attached to it, was truly amazing.

The witch-doctor dances in the red glow of the embers on the hearth of the hut with sometimes nearly half a hundredweight of jingling bits of iron and bells slung from his shoulders. He may carry an iron "cane" or two, the tops of which are carved like a horse's head, the middle like a horse's knee-joint, and the bottom like a hoof, with model stirrups and little bells tied here and there. These symbolize the horse on which he rides up into the spirit worlds during the midnight séance.

The drum is his most important piece of equipment. In some cases he will dance in quite a simple ceremonial robe, or he will borrow the ordinary

smock of any woman present. Bogoras discovered, during his sojourn with the Tchuktches, that *their* wizards sometimes utilize a second-hand garment obtained from the American trading settlements on the Alaskan side of the Bering strait. A great thought, that! Your own old overcoat, traded by the wife last summer to a fellow who gave a couple of dollars and a pot of ferns for it at your door, may now, decorated with Shamanistic fringes of leather and twenty pounds of old iron and half a gallon of well-assorted bells, be on very active service in northeast Siberia as the ceremonial robe of some devil-harrying Tchuktche Billy Sunday! . . . But his drum has got to be the real thing. Without it he cannot tune in to the spirits or get himself wafted up, or down, to the dwelling-places of the good and the bad pullers of the strings that affect the destinies of puppet mankind.

Most of the drums I have seen look more like our idea of a tambourine than a drum, the resemblance being heightened by the attachment of little bells and clattering bits of bone and iron inside the rim. They are decorated with numerous

symbolic figures and patterns, sometimes with paintings of animals and plants. A witch-doctor of the Tartar Indians of the Minusinsk region, in south central Siberia, confided to Klementz some interesting details of the meaning of the pictures on the Tchern drums. These drums are encircled with a painted line, dividing them into two parts. On the upper part is shown the dawn, the sun, two blackbirds flying with a message from the witch-doctor to the "black" spirits, a bear's tooth, the horses of Ulu Khan, and Kizilkikh Khan, the god whom one has to invoke before starting any journey or enterprise. On the lower part of the drum, announced the witch-doctor, the little white picture was a birch tree (recalling the birch-groves in which certain sacrifices are held every year), a couple of trees growing in Ulu Khan's land, White Frog and Black Frog (servant spirits of Ulu Khan), certain spirits associated with seven nests and seven feathers, seven maidens who bring seven diseases to mankind, the god Ulgere to whom one prays for cures of earache and toothache, and the Mother of the Fire.

Witch-doctoring and the exorcism of evil spirits, by the way, exists a good deal nearer the heart of modern civilization than the wilds of Siberia. Any amount of it goes on in Germany, and quite a little in France. At Rheisbach-on-the-Rhine, last winter, a "beast hunt" was organized. On three successive nights every one in the village assembled outside the cottage of a girl believed to be possessed by an evil spirit and tried to scare it out by making a hideous row, just as a Shaman does up in the Siberian Arctic. There were hundreds of people banging pots and pans, cracking whips, clashing scythes on wheels and walls, and chanting:

"What sort of beast is this?

Out with the beast!

Out with the bear!

Out! Out of the village!"

On the fourth night the excitement boiled over into a riot, and thirty-two villagers had to appear at the nearest police court, charged, be it noted, not with behaving like savages, but merely with assaulting the police. The defending attorney put



in a plea that it was a matter of honour and ancient custom for every respectable villager of Rheisbach to take part in a "beast hunt." And every one got off with a fine of a few marks.

In Westphalia a newly married woman was tortured to death last winter, to drive out a witch who possessed her. They will tell you all about it the next time you are passing through Haltern. Three weeks after her wedding, Frau Marthe Lande was taken to hospital, covered with wounds, from which she died. She described how a sooth-sayer had told her husband and his relatives that she was responsible for disease breaking out among their cattle. He recommended that the bride be locked up in a dark room, where the "witch" could be driven out of her body by starvation and beatings. After the bridegroom and his relatives had tortured her for nearly a fortnight, a neighbour blew the gaff to the police—and the poor creature was rescued from their religious ministrations.

Sacrifices, to propitiate both friendly and unfriendly spirits, are an important feature of the

Siberian Indian's religion. Often, out on the Buriat steppes, I came across carcasses of rams, impaled by sharp-pointed sapling birches with the twigs trimmed off. Sombre and menacing they looked, up against the afterglow of the western sky, along the crest of a bare ridge. In the morning sunshine, with the larks twittering around me, herds of roaming horses always in view and usually a wagon, a horseman, or a group of wayfarers in sight, they did not seem to intrude. But, at night-fall, they brushed aside the handful of centuries of civilization, and took one back to the long eras before the time of Moses, nay, of Babylon and Nineveh, when men strove, in just this same way, to influence destiny. . . .

Within historical times there have been no human sacrifices, though something approaching them still takes place among some of the nomad Indians of northeast Siberia, who, with certain religious rites, kill off their old people and those incurably ill. The Samoyedes' very name means "cannibals," but it is not clear whether their former proneness to eating each other was due to

shortage of food or to the sort of deliberate ritualistic sacrifices that are made by the other races. The Tchuktches cut open their dead, with elaborate ceremonies, and used to carve the flesh into little bits which were eaten by the relatives, but now, instead, each relative receives a small piece of the fur clothing of the deceased, adding it to his or her string of ancestor charms. Sheep are the most usual victims, but goats and horses also are slain. It is the Buriats who make the most animal sacrifices. They gather at various times of the year, in great assemblies, and combine this way of honouring ancestral spirits with sports meetings at which the best archers, horsemen, wrestlers, and leapers demonstrate their powers. Before the beasts are killed they are given a ritualistic drink of buttermilk and there are elaborate ceremonies. Most of the meat is then eaten, at a sort of barbecue; it is boiled, however, not roasted. Instead of the skins being made use of, they are stuffed with grass and hung up on specially consecrated trees, facing the point in the sky where the spirit thus honoured resides. The legs, head, and tail are left

on, and the lungs, heart, and larynx are left in the carcase, along with the stuffing.

[The sacrifice of live lambs is performed as a Jewish rite even today by the Samaritans in Palestine, of whom there are one hundred and seventy-six survivors, all but ten of whom are still living in the same neighbourhood that their sect has been inhabiting for the past two thousand years.]

Ethnologists, eagerly using tidings of tattooed races as clues by which to trace the movements of ancient races, such as the offshoots of the vanished empire whose holy place was Easter Island, with its avenues of stone images, appear not to have come across that interesting jotting in the log-book of Professor Gmelin, who found tattooed tribes in the woods around the Cossack post at Ilimsk, one hundred and ninety-two years ago. Most of them, he recorded, have face tattooings of bluish black, made by a needle and thread rubbed with soot or black chalk.

## *Chapter 7*

### DOWN TO MONGOLIA

The spring evening before I "went peasant" and left Irkutsk for Mongolia, a group of friends sat and drank coffee with me in an alcove of a cozy little café on the Bolshaya, so full of rubber-plants and ferns that we felt like animals in a jungle. An amusing place, perpetually rustling. Men left smouldering cigarettes on the leaves as they went out, and a small, convict-cropped boy in black, with an apron down to his toes, had ever and anon to go exploring through the thicket to ascertain whether yonder wreathing trail of smoke was the legitimate product of a customer or the beginning of a fire.

We drank coffee and they brought out from their pocketbooks nasty little clippings from obscure Siberian newspapers which chronicled laconically the murder of various persons along the country through which I was going to pass.

"I hope," remarked Vixen's master, "that you are taking your passport—it would be just as well."

"My dear Maurice," I was pleased to be able to retort, "I am taking *three* of my passports." The two spare ones, for handling by village headmen, who frequently come straight in from a very messy job in the fields or farmyard to examine the papers of a wayfaring stranger, were works of art. I had made them in New York. As villagers cannot read Latin characters, either printed or script, but have the real Asiatic respect for seals—the more and gaudier the better—I reckoned that these documents might as well bear the brunt of the dirty handling. If any one able to read them happened to turn up he would not understand their meaning and I could produce my genuine passport, explaining that the others were subsidiary letters of introduction from high officials across the seas.

One was a notary's marriage certificate, the other a mortgage. I had bound them, with shiny brass clips, into stiff folders of bright blue paper, and spattered them with coloured paper seals of

various shapes and sizes, with a signature across, or alongside, each seal. On the cover of one was written "Facts About Sanatogen," above a great saw-edged gold seal bearing the bold signature of Abimelech the Prophet. The certificate was filled in as follows:

#### CERTIFICATE OF MARRIAGE

This is to certify that I have this day joined in marriage *Henry Cetewayo* of Zululand and *Queen Berengaria* of *Navarre* according to the laws of the *Medes and Persians* and that there were present as witnesses *Anthony Comstock* of *New York City* and *Oscar Wilde* of *Illustrious Memory*.

Below were the seals and signatures of Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Gip the Blood, and Helen of Troy.

The other "passport" was entitled on the cover: No. 132641, Revised Edition v. Edition Revised, above the large red seal of Prester John. It carried an involved legal story, partly in print, partly in handwriting, about a mortgage trans-

action between one Hildebrand the Hittite, and William Caxton, Cleopatra, Vernon the Viceroy, the late Duke of Teck, and Alfred the Great.

They both came in very useful from time to time, and were inspected by the village *starostas* with great respect.

I sat up late that night, fixing up my pack. It was not a very simple task, for I was going to be away, quite alone, for some weeks, some of the time right off the beaten track. . . . So many things *might* happen, and one must be ready to cope with them. . . . Eventually I shoved aside the *samovar* on my bedroom table, made a cairn of absolute necessities—and halved it. There remained about half a dozen hatfuls of stuff. That, in a dirty old waterproof sheet, slung over my back, was my baggage, and two-thirds of it was toys. [If you are travelling in queer places, alone, don't put your faith in weapons. If public opinion decides that you are to be killed, you *will* be killed. Make friends with the children, wherever you stop, and bring them toys. Black men and brown men and yellow men and white men are remarkably



akin in some respects. And one of these respects is that they do not set upon and batter the brains out of a stranger who sits himself down on the floor and plays with their babes. Besides, it is fun.]

In addition to the toys there were two books, Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad* and Bacon's *Essays*, a pair of socks, some asthma powder; some phosphorus paint, copperas and galls, for making magic; electric batteries, spools of films, and so forth, including the faithful Ignatz. Ignatz is an iron-hard, sausage-shaped German emergency ration. A Leipzig professor gave him to me nearly twenty years ago, vowing that he would keep up one's strength for days. I have taken him with me all over the world, and by now we have become so attached to each other that I should feel like a cannibal if I fell upon him, in my hour of need, and ate him! . . .

When I left the hotel, in the morning, the row of *isvostchiks* on their decrepit sea-going hacks outside held their peace. I am, at all times, a lover of silence, but seldom has my heart rejoiced at a silence as it did early that May morning. The

Russian *droshka* cabby will tout for trade from every man who looks worth robbing, but here was I, merely raked by apathetic and contemptuous eyes, and left to plod afoot to the station. In my shabby fur cap, tilted truculently over one eye, my green blouse-shirt flapping in the breeze, and my trousers tucked into dirty knee-boots, I was just a "no-account" peasant who would never dream of wasting good kopecks on a *droshka* unless he was travelling with a large piece of furniture or three or four heavy sacks. . . .

With a crowd of other peasants, I clambered into a train of third- and fourth-class compartments, which lumbered slowly along the back of the swift river Angara, to Baikal. We were often sidetracked, to make way for the superior trains that carried first- and second-class people, and no fourths, with long waits during which we clambered out and sprawled gratefully on the grass. No one chafed. It was another respite from work. In Siberia it is the *bon dieu*, not the *diable*, who ordains delays.

The following evening we reached Verknie

Udinsk. Near the station the town seemed pre-occupied with drunken brawls, interspersed with shots and blowings of whistles. I found a doss-house, such as poor peasants frequent, behind a shuttered shop adorned with gaudy panel paintings of hams and sugar-loaves, and there I dozed and battled with bedbugs on the floor of a verminous kind of cupboard until dawn and the entry of the welcome *samovar*.

Verknie Udinsk has always had the reputation of being a tough town—tough in the daytime and tougher at night. Miners, escaped convicts, “brutal and licentious soldiery,” and bad characters who have sneaked out of the back door of China have created an atmosphere which the comers and goers try to live up to. Camel caravan convoymen, reaching town after a long voyage with ships of the desert, proceed to amuse themselves in the full-blooded manner of sailors of the flowing main. The Chinese and Japanese, I noticed, had practically monopolized the laundry, photography, and barbering trades.

I still remember Verknie Udinsk, with malig-

nant resentment, as the town where liver pills cost sixty cents a bottle. It seemed such a lot to pay when one wanted only half a dozen pills. I made a row in every drug-store in town, but the rock-bottom price seemed to be that sixty cents. Still, I must say, they were wonderful pills! It is possible that I mispronounced the word for liver and got something equally efficacious but intended for some expensive and interesting ailment. They were big, double the size of a large pea. They were cased in something hard that looked like glass, and felt like glass—and broke like glass, for sitting me down by the wayside one day in Mongolia, I smashed a couple with a camel's tooth that lay handy, and sniffed and tasted their content. Inside the glass was a dark brown liquid which smelt and tasted strongly of aromatic pine needles. . . . Still, I survive.

I abandoned the hunt for cheap pills about eleven o'clock, and turned westward down the deeply rutted road to the ferry across the Selenga River. On the way I passed a group of convicts from the big whitewashed prison where bearded

sentries, with bayoneted rifles slung across their back, scowled down at passers-by from the plank path just below the top of the walls. The men were well down the road, out of sight of the prison. The warder was ahead; the convicts strolled behind, chatting and laughing. Presently a convict found that his cigarette had gone out. He ran ahead and spoke to the warder. The warder politely stopped, struck a match, hollowed his hands, and gave the convict a light. Then the convict gave the warder a cigarette, and hollowed *his* hands, to shelter the match. Pleasant human amenities, these. I wrote them off against the pill-profiteering of the town. . . .

The ferry was rather fun. It was a large two-ruddered pontoon, slipping along a rope which ran through wheels aboard. The river is some hundred yards wide, and swift and powerful ran the current. We had about fifteen carts aboard, a squash. Most of the carters were Buriats. The rope creaked and strained, the horses got restless, and we lurched this way and that, almost scuppers under.

We were landed on the fringe of a sandy, sparsely-grassed plain in a bowl of the hills. A keen wind was blowing down from the looming Khamar Daban range. Here and there a thicket of willow bushes, not yet in leaf. And yellow dandelions, a reminder of spring at home, halfway across the world. Crested larks stood watching us pass, their topknots fluttering.

Willow underbrush continued for two or three miles, until, beyond a pontoon bridge across a sandy creek, I came abruptly out on to the bare steppe; it was sparsely grassed and leprous with blotches of evaporated salt. An eye ranging through the emptiness caught an occasional distant sheepfold of wicker hurdles with a Buriat shepherd's hut of felt, like a big cloche hat, at the corner. Verknie Udinsk's whitewashed towers, its churches and its prison, were now faraway toys, dwarfed by the enveloping mountains. The silence was so intense as to be obtrusive. It was like those disturbing silences that wake you up on the Continental railways, in the dead of night, when the sleeping-cars stop for ten minutes at Lyons or

Leipzig. There were no trees through which the breeze could make gentle music. There were no singing or croaking birds. Just the faint tinkle of bells, now and then, from a horse a mile away.

The sun was hot and the wind was cold, which formed curious mirages. Lakes that were not, and hills that had broken loose from their moorings, lay ahead when I looked up slopes where the sun had heated the sand. Hills wobbled and flowed, dissolved and reappeared, in a most disconcerting way.

In the afternoon I reached the village of Mukhina, and went to the post house. The guest room, where wayfarers have the privilege of sleeping on the floor, was distempered in pale blue-grey, and the ceiling and the big brick stove were white-washed, which gave it an atmosphere of tranquillity and cool Quakerish dignity. The Siberian villager has not yet become civilized enough to clutter up his house with ornaments and knick-knacks, superfluous furniture, and all the rest of the expensive rubbish with which we stuff our own houses. The result is that nearly always a room is

restful. The only thing on the walls, as a rule, is the *ikon*, or holy picture, in the angle of one corner—sometimes a cluster of *ikons*. Generally there are one or two massive long wooden tables, a couple of forms, and two or three small benches. Around the walls is built a bench, which serves as seats by day and beds by night. Any boxes, bundles, or oddments, such as chests of clothes, spare lamps, ducks sitting on a clutch of eggs, or inedible household stores, are just pushed under the wall bench, from which, in the better cottages, hangs a curtain of gaudy cotton stuff. If, finding the bench too narrow, you sleep on the floor, you never know what may be alongside you. One morning I woke up face to face, at six-inch range, with an indignant-looking duck; on another occasion, bumping my elbow against something hard in the middle of the night, I sat up and felt through the curtain to see what it was. After running my hand along it, in the darkness, for about four feet, I began to have my suspicions. Another couple of feet, and a brief, groping investigation of the diameter, brought conviction. It was a



coffin! There I was, wedged between it and a snoring old man; and the rest of the floor was covered with sleepers. I thought of the virulent epidemics of smallpox that run through so many villages, and are treated as carelessly as colds. . . . I did not feel happy. . . .

"So Death is in the house?" I remarked, reverently, to my host, in the morning, pointing toward my recent "bed." No, he explained, the coffin had been bought last winter, but his wife's father had recovered from his illness. So it was just being kept around until it should come in useful.

But to return to Mukhina.

The bearded postmaster came in to greet me, shaking hands with the heartiness of one greeting an old friend not seen for many a moon. An Englishman from America, and strolling in, baggageless and alone, as though he had merely come from a neighbour's cottage across the road! That was amusing, that was! He must tell Sergei about that. He went to the door and shouted to a giant, who joined us and agreed that it was "a good one." We talked about weather and the state of the

trails. Wasn't I cold? There had been snow a foot deep here three days ago. The postmaster's wife sat rolling cigarettes; she never said a word. I wanted horses to the next village, for the nineteen-verst hike had worn great holes in my socks and chafed my heels. Russian knee-boots are very bad for long walks, as they keep slipping up and down your heel and there is no instep support. [That does not bother the Siberian as he rarely walks a mile, in a land where horses are as plentiful as dogs are with us.] But not to wear them, outside the towns, is to make yourself as conspicuously a stranger as if you were wearing a dinner jacket. Besides, such is the state of the tracks through villages during rainy weather that knee-boots are absolutely necessary.

We drank tea and broke bread in the log-walled lobby. I watched a gigantic bedbug creep up the wall beside the postmaster. He saw it too but paid no heed to it. I felt it would be tactless immediately to turn around, but I did so in a few seconds and was relieved to find nothing worse at my back than several minute ants.

Late in the afternoon I left Mukhina. The wind was blowing cold, and the postmaster, good fellow, was worried about my lack of a coat; at the last minute he insisted on bringing out to me his old pony-skin *shuba*, jokingly offering to sell it for fifteen kopecks. I told him I couldn't raise the price. "Never mind," he said, "wear it for the ride and the driver will bring it back."

We made a great start, the old driver bringing his whip down across the backs of the dreamy, unsuspecting horses with a sudden resounding smack! as if he had been roaming the world in search of them for years, in order to get in that one good blow. There was that sensation you get when you happen to be looking backward, seated on a sled, and your friend with the rope gives it a powerful yank—and over I went on my back, in the hay. The cart was a sort of bowl of loosely fastened plates of thin sheet iron, slung on a timber framework. As the horses galloped over the rough track and the big stones that littered it, it crashed and thundered. But when I had scrambled on to all fours in the hay I found the *yemstchik* was driv-

ing back toward Verknie Udinsk. He misunderstood me when I clutched his shoulder, and did not slacken speed. We bawled and gesticulated at each other for a hundred yards before I made him realize that Mongolia, not Moscow, happened to be my destination. . . . Every one in the village turned out to jeer and guffaw as we returned through it at a subdued trot. That was the sort of joke the simple Siberian loves more than any other except seeing you fall backward out of a boat.

Sunset was now approaching and we met homing haycarts driven by Buriat natives. A collision looked imminent each time, for neither their *yemstchik* nor mine showed the slightest intention of moving off the narrow track, to let the other man pass. However, at the last moment, the native always gave way, scowling and staring hard. No truer remark has been made than the sage's pronouncement that if you want to pass unobserved and undiscussed, the crowded city is the place for you. Out in the solitary places every casual passer-by is an object of keen interest. I was dressed just like any other peasant, but every one I used to

pass, in the woods and steppes of Siberia, used to stare at me with absorption. It was an unconscious instinct to memorize a strange face, in a land where strangers are few and far between, so that one would "have a line on him" and his movements in case of subsequent mysterious occurrences in that part of the country.

The clearness of the air and the distance one could see was wonderful. Nothing in the far distance was dimmer; it was merely smaller. Just before we reached Klewtshevskaya, at dusk, we passed on our left a conspicuous pyramid-shaped holy hill, with some *obis* (Shamanistic shrines) on it and a cluster of field *ongons* below. Two of the field *ongons* were set almost directly under the three telegraph wires that go down to Kiakhta-Troitskosavsk, the frontier of Outer Mongolia.

The last few versts it had been getting very cold, and we had passed carts driven by bears. If you want to insist that those bears were really fur-capped *men*, huddled up in great, shapeless fur overcoats, the storm collars of which came right up to the top of the head behind, and up to the

eyes in front, I dare say you are right. But any passing bear, I do assure you, would have greeted them as one of the family.

Klewtshevskaya is a small village at the mouth of a gorge running up into pine-forested mountains. We arrived at the customary gallop with which *yemstchiks* enter and leave villages; I wondered my ribs were not shaken apart. A panicky herd of cows ran ahead, and nineteen dogs—I counted them—ran behind and alongside, barking furiously and even leaping up at the horses, like a pack of wolves. Here the houses were built of huge solid logs, often more than a foot thick. A bundle of swords and rifles stood in a corner of the post station.

This was an "arty" post station. One does encounter them very occasionally, and the pictures were well worth examination. One was a Chinese engraving of Napoleon Bonaparte—I had never suspected that there could be such a thing! Another was an advertisement for an Arabian cigarette. Then came a faded photograph of the postmaster (seated, of course) and his young

bride (standing) and three gaudy German "scraps" of the sort that small children paste into an album. Next a postal card, converted into a card of Easter greetings by the simple process of stamping a couple of words on it, depicting two clowns flogging a hog through a paper-covered hoop.

The family, father, mother, and a boy and girl of about seventeen, were sullen and taciturn. They had their supper in an almost dark corridor, munching almost without a word, refused to lend me a blanket, and went to bed directly afterward. I lay down on the bare boards and slept, with envious thoughts of all the cozy beds in the world. There was a great hullabaloo at dawn, crowings of cocks and barkings of dogs. The postmaster woke me up at a quarter past five, apparently shocked at my sloth. I breakfasted on eggs, black bread, and tea, and went off an hour later to examine the holy hill. The dogs were an appalling nuisance, more than half starved, savage and aggressive. You soon learn in a Siberian village never



*Upper left: TUNGUS WOMAN; upper right: TUNGUS MAN; lower left:  
AN OROTCHEN YOUTH; lower right: AN OROTCHEN MATRON.*





*Upper left: A BURIAT GIRL; upper right: A YUKAGHIR INDIAN;*  
*bottom: BURIAT WOMEN. NOTE DECORATED DERBY HATS.*

to keep close to a wall when coming round a corner, for to appear suddenly is to invite prompt attack. If you keep well to the left before turning down a track to the right, the animals see you before you are close to them. There is a lot of wolf strain in most of the big dogs; the wolves breed freely with strays. When I had returned from the first stay that I made in Siberia, and was sorting natural history specimens, I was much puzzled by two brown stones that I found in an overcoat pocket. There were no entries in my journals which seemed to apply to them, nor could I see anything interesting in them. They were just a couple of dull stones. I put them on a shelf, where they would often catch my eye. Some day, I thought, I may recall their story. And, sure enough, I did. They must have been unused munitions left over from the pocketful of stones which I dismounted to stuff my pockets with before entering each village while riding up the Shilka valley. The sight of my fox terrier aroused every cur in the place and they came on in a pack, which

I had to disperse by "bombing." Two or three hits that sent a dog yelping away, however, were enough to disperse the rest.

It was about a mile up to the top of the holy hill, from which there was a wonderful view. There were various *ongons*, but I deemed it inadvisable to approach them too closely, as a group of Buriats below had followed me and were watching. They do not like too close a prying into their secret religious rites by a Russian peasant, though civil enough if it is an official or person of importance who shows a polite and tactful interest. There were ceremonial hearths here and there, with boughs and carved, weather-worn poles stuck in them. I passed an odd pillar made up of a few rocks placed one on top of another. A few hundred feet further on I chanced to look back—and the pillar had assumed the perfect silhouette of a little hunch-backed, brown-robed man! The witch-doctors are very clever at making these mysterious figures, entirely of uncarved rocks; subsequently I found several of them, always set

up where they would be visible against the skyline from some track across the steppe.

I walked on to Ubukanskaya that day, leaving the track in the afternoon to visit more Shamanistic hearths. Two of them had their boughs decorated with coloured rags, which passing natives had torn from their garments and tied on. Below, on the circle of flat stones, were strewn little copper coins; and sweetmeats in paper wrappers, bought at some Russian village shop. The Buriats do not err on the side of generosity when they make cash offerings to the gods and the spirits. Occasionally it is a one-kopeck piece (half a cent) that is proffered but usually only the half-kopeck, a coin as rarely seen as the French centime or the British farthing. I took a number of these little coins, to be strung into a necklace, but for every half-kopeck I left a five-kopeck piece, so the spirits had no cause to brew trouble for me. The local witch-doctors must have thought that some Buriat Vanderbilt had been passing that way! How they accounted for the film spools I can't say. In chang-

ing the spools in my little camera, I hung up, alongside the gaudy rags, the brass clip one discards, and with the silver paper I moulded little silver men, and hung them on as additional decorations. They looked very good magic, glittering there in the sunshine. . . .

At Ubukanskaya my peasant host gave me a drink that I do not recommend to you—bullock's blood tea with an "acid drop" in it. [You know acid drops? Those candies of boiled sugar with a strong taste of synthetic lemon.] I like the idea, and the look, of brick tea, in hard, neat, shinily smooth black tiles, on which is embossed a picture in bas-relief. But they consist of mere tea dust made into a paste with the blood of bullocks; the blood tinges the liquid when you brew your tea; the dust lies in the bottom of the glass, like coffee grounds, and gets into your mouth. The peasants often drop small candies, flavoured with fruit essences, into their tea, which results in many a weird experience for the palate. Apparently there was a time when brick tea was better, for a traveller some two hundred years ago, recording that it

"consists not in leaves but in solid pieces, like terracatechu, dark brown without and yellowish within, and gives a reddish tincture," added: "It dissolves in water, like sugar, and gives no sediment. It has a grateful smell, and is pretty astringent. It is the opinion of many that this tea is prepar'd of the juice of the tea-leaves." In those days it was called stone tea, and the Tartar poor, relishing a good deep colour in their brew as the British poor do today, used to put a decoction of madder in it to give it a mahogany complexion.

The Mongols and Buriat natives of the Trans-Baikal, "simple-lifers" as they are, have a much more elaborate way of making tea than ours; I got that rough-sea feeling whenever it was offered to me, especially when it had a nice large lump of raw fat dumped into it as a more palatable substitute for milk! The tea is put into the kettle with some cold or lukewarm water and a big pinch of salt. When the water steams the housewife stirs it with a wooden ladle until it boils and the leaves have settled. Then she pours it into a bowl. It is no use greedily passing your own little bowl, for there

is a lot more to be done. Balls of greasy dough, made of butter and meal, have to be kneaded and fried. These are dropped, all hot and sizzling, into—the kettle! and the now nearly cold tea poured back into it again. Eventually, after a thorough stirring, and a re-heating, the tea is ready.

The village shop at Ubukanskaya, like most of them in the southern Trans-Baikal, was kept by Chinese. It had no socks, which I needed. Few of the village shops have. Housewives are supposed to knit, during the winter, when nothing can be done out-of-doors, all the socks the family will need for a year. They are the serviceable colour of porridge, and harsh and scratchy. If you hanker after a coloured pair you buy them from a passing hawker, or at a booth in the bazaar of a town anywhere from fifty to five hundred miles away. And what socks! They were just boomerang-shaped cotton bags which the factory had apparently found a way of squashing flat into the shape of a human foot. Quite new, they did their best to function as socks but slid hopelessly down at the heel. Once the laundry had dealt with them, they

gave up the deception and came back in the shape of bananas, or, indeed, bowls; I remember one pair of mine that measured nine inches across the top.

No wonder the Siberian pioneers preferred to drive their womenfolk out into the woods to collect birds' nests and make really comfortable socks out of them. The nests thus collected were of a little bird with a greenish-yellow breast and grey back; they closely resemble those of the European long-tailed titmouse, being made of silky down, delicate feathers, hairs, moss, and lichen. They were shredded up and spun, like flax or wool, on a spinning-wheel, into a warm, soft yarn, which was then knitted into socks.

I bargained with the owner of a small two-wheeled cart to drive me on to the next village. There was a hitch in starting, as a wheel came off and men had to be fetched to mend it. To see them coming, you would have reckoned that they were going to chop it up for kindling wood, as they each came swinging an axe. Call a Siberian to attend to anything that needs fixing, and instinctively he



looks around for his axe. He performs miracles with it.

Down through the pass the wind blew cold. The young man who sat at my side, driving, fingered the corner of my coat and shook his head. "Too thin," he said. "Too thin for this country."

At the summit we stopped our panting horse and paused to examine a fine *obi* or sacrificial altar, built right out in the track. Into a heap of stones were stuck branches, and to the branches were tied dingy rags and brightly coloured scraps of torn shirt. (The Siberian blouse-shirt, worn hanging loose outside the trousers, is not patterned but all bright pink or red, blue or green, yellow or purple. I myself, with characteristic modesty, always sported a chaste creation in olive green. I had a great hankering after the vivid scarlet shirts; they would have looked very *chic* in conjunction with my black sealskin cap, which I wore with the Beatty tilt, on the side of the head, and made me feel a great dog, but those scarlet shirts catch the eye of every lurking person for miles around, and seeing, not being seen, was my object.) There was

even a Buriat hat on one of the sticks. A couple of Russians coming up from the south stopped their cart and stooped, with a laugh, to poke about among the offerings to see what was worth taking. They selected some screws of paper with tobacco in, leaving the sweetmeats, rings of hard bread, lumps of sugar, half kopecks and other oddments. When they noticed that I was focussing my camera on them they scrambled up and ran back to their cart, shielding their faces with their arms. Calling out some angry remark, off they drove.

Beyond the divide sank a wide expanse of steppe, flanked in the blue distance by denuded buttes. Grey marmots scampered into their holes. Black-tailed larks soared, twittering, above us, and a hoopoe watched us from a solitary pine. The driver discussed my expensive little waistcoat pocket camera. It was a child's toy, was it not? How much had it cost? I should have been marked down in Trans-Baikal circles as some one worth robbing had I told him, so I said, "Oh, twenty roubles." He was amazed. "For half a dozen," I added promptly. "They are sold, you know, by

the *desyatok* and *pol-desyatok*." Faces, and horses and wayside shrines, he hazarded, could be photographed with a toy like that, but, of course, it was no good for taking a mountain, or even a hill. *That* needed a big *apparat*, did it not? He looked very sceptical when I explained that my toy would tackle a whole range of mountains and think nothing of the job.

Up the slope toward us came a splash of Asiatic colour, a Buriat abbot in vivid yellow robes, in a cart driven by a scarlet *lama*. We left the track and drove out over the steppe to the eastward where I examined several sacrificial altars, and holy bushes, gay with rags.

Now to find these decorated bushes and branches was extremely interesting. Here were Mongols and Buriats doing just what orthodox British Christian peasants have been doing, on visiting certain "holy wells" as far apart as the Highlands of Scotland and the moors of Cornwall, until within the memory of living man (and what Breton peasants are still doing), although, so early as A.D. 963, the Saxon king, Edgar, officially

forbade "the worshipping of fountains," and the Canons of Anselm laid down, A.D. 1102, that no one was to attribute reverence or sanctity to a fountain without the local bishop's authority. The spirits of St. Madern's well, in Cornwall, were always propitiated by offerings of pins and pebbles, which were tossed in and around it. A few decades ago, pins thus sacrificed (as the Buriats here were sacrificing half kopecks, rags, lumps of sugar, and so forth) could be collected by the handful around most Cornish wells. And, more striking still, at St. Kilda's well, no one dared approach with empty hands, or without making some offering to the spirit residing there, of shells, pins, needles, *stones, coins, or rags!*

And there were these *holy bushes* of the Buriat steppes in Britain, too, until less than a century ago. Ragwell, near Newcastle, got its name from the quantity of rags tied on the adjacent bushes as offerings. St. Tegla's well of Denbighshire, in Wales, had to be propitiated with a specific sum, viz., and to wit, four pence.

Craigie well was another home of a holy bush.

It is situated in the parish of Avoch, along the north shore of Munlochy bay, on Blackisle of Ross, off Scotland. Up until the early part of last century, there was a large briar bush growing near the two boulders from between which gushed the spring that was literally covered with shreds and patches of cloth, stuck on thorns as offerings by the numerous pilgrims who visited it at certain times of the year, especially during the night preceding the first Sunday morning of May. Nobody dared omit to add a rag, as such an omission would have been deemed an insult by the spirit of the well, and would have entailed unpleasant reprisals. The water of the well—not a well, in the modern sense, but a pool below a spring—had to be sipped before sunrise, otherwise the spirit took no notice of your prayer. “O Lord,” one pilgrim was heard to declare, when after kneeling, drinking, and muttering a few inaudible words, he rose, “Thou knowest that weel would it be for me this day an’ I had stoopit my knees and my heart before Thee in spirit and in truth as often as I have stoopit them afore this well. But we maun keep the customs of our fathers!” Little did he guess that

those "fathers" went back in a long, long chain, link by link, ten thousand years on ten thousand, to this nursery of the human race, where, too, the descendants of his father's fathers still feel that they "maun keep the customs." . . .

How spacious and tranquil the world seemed from that hill-top! There was utter silence and in some directions one could see thirty or forty miles. Over east I was thrilled to see my first *lamaserai*, the gilded pinnacles of the temple buildings glittering in the sunshine, and a cluster of log cottages around. Close at hand I came across a hollowed log aqueduct down which ran the *lamas'* water supply, for many miles. The deep dust that now formed the track was a blessing after the hard clay, which badly jolted the *tarantass*. To the left lay a lake where duck paddled about on the fringe of a thicket of rushes. Over a low pass we came into a new valley and crossed a bridge across a little river. Here we met a caravan of Mongol carts, evidently carrying wares of value, for at its head and tail rode a Buriat policeman, armed with sabre and rifle. And in to the village of Ubukunskaya we came. It had a little church, and a shop

plastered with names and coloured paintings of groceries and delicatessen, but hardly anything inside, except brick tea and sugar. The sausage was ancient and wormy. . . . A woman sat spinning flax outside a cottage. There was no other sign of life in the place.

I drove on in a crude, springless two-wheeled cart, to Arbuzovskaya, with a sullen small boy handling the reins of woven horsehair. He alternatively dozed, or sped on our lazy steed like a charioteer when he wanted to show off before passing Buriats. Those on horseback broke into a gallop, and rode round us, grinning and calling out taunts that made his face twitch with fury. In the middle of the afternoon we came down from the bare, treeless steppes into a couple of miles of water-meadows that might have been a pretty part of Connecticut; herds of horses grazed in the fast-greening grass. Then on to the steppes again, sandy, sparsely-grassed uplands blotched here and there with pools of evaporated salt; in the distance, to the west, flickered gilded gables of a *lamaserai*.

## Chapter 8

### WHERE THE BIRDS BUILD INDOORS

Arbuzovskaya was a delightful discovery, not a village but a haphazard peppering of log houses, entirely inhabited by men and doves. And, observe what happens in a womanless hamlet—hardly a room in the houses had not birds' nests in it. The swallows' neat mud-cup nests even clustered along the walls of the staircase and the upper less-frequented passages. They looked very nice, too. There were neither wall-papers nor carpets to be harmed, and it must have been charming, a month or so later, when the migrants arrived, to watch them sitting on their eggs and gracefully wheeling in and out of the open doorways and windows. The doves, too, had the freedom of the interior of the house; they perched, softly cooing, on the whitewashed ledges and beams, by last year's nests of twigs, or stalked about under the table, searching for crumbs. It was pitiful to think that one



day a dweller in Arbuzovskaya might ride off and get married, returning with a woman, who would give a horrified yell, seize a broom, and sweep them all out, nests and all.

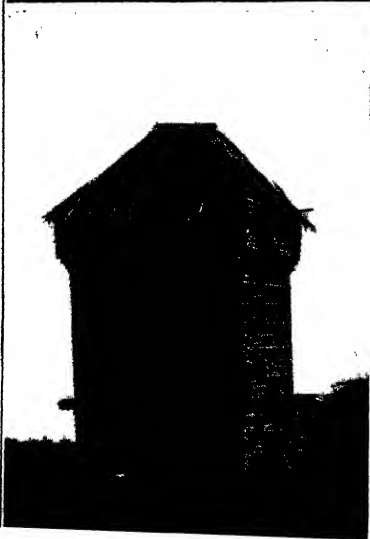
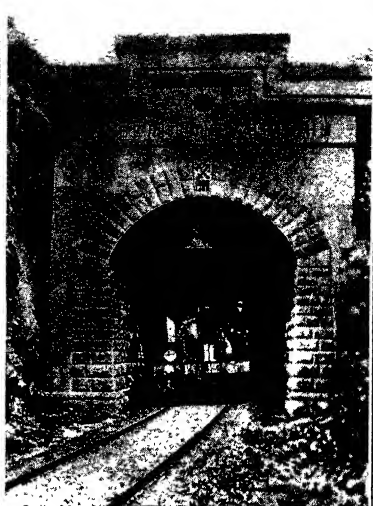
The post-drivers, grooms, and hangers-on dwelt in tumble-down log shacks at the corners of the horse pens. Mostly they were shaggy-bearded old men, past active work in the fields, and young boys.

The postmaster was a pleasant, open-faced young man, in a plum-coloured shirt. His office equipment was simple—a bench and table, in an alcove of a large bare room, a wooden strong-box, a *samovar*, and a disc-shaped loaf of black bread as big as a cart-wheel. Every now and then one of the white doves flew across the room and tried to land on his table, but this he would not allow. Sometimes a dove persisted and kept dodging his hand, violently flapping its wings. “No women here?” I asked him. He caught only the word “women,” amid the noise of one of these encounters.

“Women!” he exclaimed. “*Women!*”—and



*Top:* TRAVELLING BY TARANTASS THROUGH THE TAIGA; *center:* A CAMEL CARAVAN OF TEA ENTERING SIBERIA AT KIAKHTA, AFTER CROSSING THE GOBI DESERT OF MONGOLIA; *bottom:* THE OROTCHEN INDIANS SLING THEIR BABIES IN BIRCHBACK CRADLES ON SIDE OF REINDEER WHEN THEY TRAVEL.



*Upper left:* A CHURCH IN IRKUTSK; *upper right:* THE TUNNEL THROUGH WHICH THE TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILROAD PIERCES THE YABLONOI MOUNTAINS OF THE TRANS-BAIKAL. NOTE DRAMATIC INSCRIPTION, "TO THE GREAT OCEAN" (THE PACIFIC); *lower left:* A CORNER TOWER OF THE THREE-HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD COSSACK STOCKADE AT YAKUTSK; *lower right:* ONE OF THE PRIMITIVE WINDMILLS ON THE STEPPES OF WESTERN SIBERIA.

glanced round apprehensively, as if expecting the creatures to pop their heads out at him round a corner. . . .

After about ten versts, over monotonous treeless highlands, I sighted, away to the west, the waters of Goozinoi ozero (Goose lake), leaden and gloomy under the early evening sky. And, on the far shore, the white buildings of the great *lamaserai*, where dwells the *Khambo Lama*, or archbishop, of the Buriats. One day the archæologist will have great hunting in this desolate region. The natives tell you of an ancient twelve-foot granite monolith, on which are carved the face of a man and the figures of two human beings, and mediæval Chinese records mention a race (now vanished) who lived hereabouts in the ninth century; they expelled a tribe of Huno. Bits of their bronze axes and arrow-heads have already been found.

Up to two hundred and fifty years ago the Buriats, at present a race of Mongolic stock, were pagan Shamanists; then Lhasa instituted a missionary campaign and sent word to Urga, the

capital of what is now called Outer Mongolia, to save the souls of the people of the North. There are now some thirty-five *lamaserais* north of the Siberian border. The Buddhism of Lhasa, in the course of time, became blended with many of the Shamanistic beliefs of the forests and steppes of Siberia, making a religion very difficult for even a skilled theologian to understand in all its aspects.

July is the Goozinoi *ozero* establishment's great time, for then is held a picturesque festival—half fair, half devotional exercises—to which scores of thousands of Buriat families trek, from all over the Trans-Baikal. Then is performed the bizarre Devil Dance, by *lamas* wearing masks of bogeys that one sees in bad nightmares, to the accompaniment of an extraordinary orchestra consisting of bells and triangles; booming conch shells, brought from the Indian Ocean beaches all through the mysterious unmapped regions of Central Asia; throbbing drums and barbarically clashing cymbals; shrilling, high-pitched reed pipes and the biggest trumpets in the world—fifteen feet long,

with little wheels at one end, to hold the mouth off the ground.

A feature of these days of high festival, amid the thousands of little encampments of the faithful, spread over miles of rolling steppe, are parades in honour of a wooden white elephant, like a monstrous toy. Like a toy, too, he is fixed up on a low four-wheeled base, harnessed to a temple on wheels, and towed around by long lines of volunteers, to the cacophonous strains of sackbut and psaltery.

The *Khambo*, or chief, *Lama* furnishes his house in old-fashioned Russian style and is very proud of his chairs and tables. The ordinary *lamas*, however, have to squat on the floors of their huts and "live native." A Trans-Baikal *lamaserai* is not one big building, with residential quarters attached, but a holy village consisting of a scattering of a large number of log cottages, little temples of log and tinted plaster, and prayer wheels, surrounding a chief temple that is usually not at all an imposing structure. At Goozeroi, the *datsan*

(temple) is a big and highly ornamental place, as befitting its dignity as cathedral seat of the *Khambo*. It holds six or seven hundred monks; the *Khambo's* yellow-upholstered throne is set up in front of the most sacred shrine; his rank is denoted by a red vestment worn over his yellow robe. . . .

Now the track bore up into abrupt, stony-sloped hills, with plenty of pines growing. Here and there clusters of goats and sheep were grazing; and deliberative cows, in single file, were trekking toward a common goal. Evidently there was a farm hereabouts, though I did not see it. There were many fine rugged spots for an *obi*, but not one appeared, even at the crest of the pass. The track presently passed through a belt of pines; the lower branches of the first three or four of them bore gay-hued rags, tied on by the passing faithful. Now another long valley opened out, shallow and treeless. Dusk had fallen, but far ahead lay a faint white blur—Selenginsk at last.

I spent a very cold night on a bare bench in a draughty hut, trying to keep awake, as I did not at

all like the whisperings and peerings through a knot hole in a partitioned-off alcove where two villainous-looking fellow wayfarers were resting. There was no one else in the hut, as the family of half-breed Buriats who owned it lived in a cottage across the yard.

However, I awoke, after all, with an unslit gorge, in the morning, somewhat to my astonishment.

Selenginsk is one of the very few places in the Trans-Baikal with a history. Now still shown in the atlas in the type used to designate towns of importance, I found it to have become just an ordinary little agricultural village, like hundreds of others in Siberia. Two hundred years ago it was the first town behind the frontier trading *entrepôt* between Muscovy and China.

It was in Selenginsk that Bell, tarrying for a reply to the letter that he had sent ahead to the Emperor Kam Hi of China, asking permission for his embassy to proceed on its mission to Peking, encountered a picturesque holy man who had walked up from India, a journey for which, in



these days, he would have won the gold medal of a geographical society, had he kept his eyes open. It was on June 12, 1720, that they met. "Walking along the banks of the river," recorded the Ambassador, "I was a little surprised at the figure and dress of a man standing among a number of boys who were angling for small fishes. The person bought all the fishes alive, and immediately let them go again into the river, which he did gently, one by one. The boys were very civil to him, though they looked upon him as distracted, on account of his behaviour. During this ceremony he took little notice of me, though I spoke to him several times. I soon perceived by his dress and the streak of saffron on his forehead that he was one of the Brachmans from India. After setting all the fish a-swimming he seemed much pleased; and having learned a little of the Russian language and a smattering of the Portuguese, began to converse with me. I carried him to my lodgings, and offered to entertain him with a dram, but he would taste nothing, for he said it was against the rules of his religion to eat or drink with strangers. I asked him

the reason why he bought the fish to let them go again. He told me that perhaps the souls of some of his deceased friends or relatives had taken possession of these fishes; and, upon that supposition, it was his duty to relieve them." After this chat, he used to visit Bell every day—"a chearful old man," about seventy, with hair six feet long! "The hair was not all his own, but collected as relicks of his friends, and others of his profession, reputed saints; all of which he had intermixed and matted with his natural hair." He told the Ambassador that he had often been in Madras. Latterly he had been one of a group of pilgrims who journeyed afoot to Lhasa and Urga, from Hindustan. . . .

For some seventy-five years now the Russian Government has not permitted foreign missionaries of civilized nations to work in Siberia, although the existence of a couple of million or so of pagans has been regarded with equanimity by the State Orthodox Church, which has made no energetic attempt to convert them. But no ban has been placed on the Buddhist missionaries from Tibet and Outer Mongolia, who have been work-

ing steadily further and further north, in the Trans-Baikal, establishing *lamaserai* after *lamaserai* as they went. There are now *lamaserais* even north of the Trans-Siberian railroad. In 1817, however, the London Missionary Society was allowed to establish a little base among the southern Buriats. Travelling overland for thousands of miles, Mr. Stallybras and his wife crossed Russia and Siberia to Irkutsk, whence, in the fall of 1819, they went on to Selenginsk, where they were joined by Mr. and Mrs. Yuill and Mr. Swan. There they worked for twenty-two years, during which period three of the group died. The traveller Erman visited the scene of this interesting experiment in 1829, crossing from Selenginsk to the other side of the river. "The two wooden houses occupied by them," he reported, "have a remarkably picturesque and pleasing appearance, at the very foot of the rugged and riven granite rocks which there bound the valley. Of the missionaries we found but one, Mr. Robert Yuill, at home; the other two had gone to the steppes on the Onon, to learn and teach among the Buriats bordering on

the Chinese. We were extremely glad to find that the plans of conversion were here to all intents and purposes abandoned and that the missionaries were engaged chiefly in the zealous study of the Mongolian language and literature. The English seem to have profited by the example of the wise tolerance which distinguished the Russians, which is here manifested as completely toward the civilized Buriats as toward the ruder tribes in other parts of Siberia. From the Russians the indigenous tribes receive at present no further instruction than what follows from their being allowed to see the advantages of a moderate, and hence, to them, not revolting, degree of industry. But it is never lost sight of that the languages and manners of these nations are as completely endowed by nature with independence as those of Europeans, and that therefore they ought not to be eradicated but to be observed and learned. The Siberian Russians have found it advantageous, in many cases, to adopt the usages of the indigenous tribes, because these usages, being founded on long experience, harmonize completely with the nature of the country

and climate. It is easy to perceive that teachers who see matters from this point of view must necessarily renounce any direct attempt at religious conversion, and confine themselves to oral or written communication respecting conflicting creeds or tenets; and, in fact, that is all the Russian priests in Siberia ever venture to do. With these modest intentions, M. Iguminov established a school at Verknie Udinsk as early as 1818, in which he instructed the children of the *ta-ish*, or petty Mongol chiefs, in Russian, and taught Buriat and other Mongol dialects to the Russian traders. This, like all the other undertakings of the same distinguished man, originated entirely with himself, and in his love of knowledge. On the arrival of the English missionaries, M. Iguminov gave up the school. Mr. Yuill informed us that up to the present time neither he, nor any of his colleagues, has baptized a single Buriat; and, moreover, that, by order of the Russian Government, proselytes, should any present themselves, must join the Greek Communion. On the other hand the zealous English Protestants had made themselves acquainted

with the Mongolian and Russian languages, so that they were now trying to continue M. Iguminov's system of instruction. Mr. Yuill had already taught Latin to some of the Buriats; we saw with him the complete MS. of an elementary work on geometry and trigonometry in the Buriat language. There were a good many examples of calculations written in it in the Mongolian numerals, so that to complete the utility of this valuable gift nothing more is wanted than tables of logarithms in Mongolian, and the printing of the whole. Furthermore, Mr. Yuill showed us a copy of the work called in China The Emperor's Book, which was printed in Peking in the thirteenth century. It was brought to Siberia by the last of the Russian spiritual missions, and is one of the most voluminous but, without a doubt, the oldest of what are called the royal dictionaries. It is arranged not alphabetically but according to logical principles, in chapters rather arbitrarily divided. It contains for every Manchu word the corresponding Mongolian, together with a complete definition in the Mongolian language. . . ."

I wandered about Selenginsk for a while, but

there were not many unusual things to see. The huge church and crowded graveyard told their own story of the days when the place was large and flourishing. A Chinese family ran the chief of the three or four shops, and demanded exorbitant sums for the small purchases I made. Some Buriat customers, too, were complaining. In the old times, related Strahlenburg, "the Mungals and heathens give for one Pound and a half of Bisert (coloured glass beads) a whole Tun of Kitaika, or Cotton Ware"—but nowadays those same "Mungals and heathens" have the current market prices for beads and Chinese piece-goods as well as any city trading concern. An old brown windmill on a knoll near the river was the only prominent landmark remaining in the village besides the big church, and a smaller church on the outskirts.

I chartered a *tarantass* and left for Povorotnaya. For the first two or three miles the track lay over a small alluvial plain, once the bed of the river Selenga. The close-cropped turf was studded with patches of budding willow bushes; beyond lay a

wall of brown butt ends of undulating lateral ridges, the river cliff.

The ferry barge lay at anchor in mid-stream, about one hundred and fifty yards from the bank; her crew were caulking the seams of another barge pulled up in the bushes. They came down, pulled in the ferry, and unharnessed my horses; aboard we all went, various Buriats afoot who had not been thought worth a special trip and had had to wait until more lucrative business should arrive, and a yellow-robed abbot in his little two-wheeled cart. A wintry wind was blowing down from the Central Asian highlands, numbing one's feet and hands, though in sheltered spots the sunshine was almost too hot to bear. Landing on the far bank, we found ourselves among steep sandy hills. The wheels of the *telyega* sank deep in the sand as the track climbed up to a pass. Down on to a sandy plain surrounded by sandy hills on which grew a few pines. Wild geese with vivid black and white markings and reddish-brown backs were flying and, alighting near the track, waddled along so



close that we could have stoned them. Larks, too, were very tame and took no more notice of passing carts than if they were grazing cows. Hawks were hovering around a rocky cliff. . . .

My *yemstchik* now beheaded me—on a film. He had been pestering me for information about photography ever since I had been using my camera down at the ford, and I told him that he himself should be a photographer. It was a terrible business training him, and eradicating his firm conviction that once he had found me in the view-finder the photograph was taken. Why worry about finding and manipulating puzzling little knobs and levers when there stood your victim, plainly, if mysteriously, trapped in the view-finder! Then he took to sweeping the horizon, to east and west, simultaneously pressing every knob and lever in sight. . . . Finally, he did get the hang of the idea and took a picture of me that was excellent from the feet upward, but ended abruptly at the neck.

At the village of Povorotnaya I was provided with a big, roomy *tarantass*, half full of hay. The

driver lent me his warm black sheepskin coat. Three horses abreast drew us along at a smart clip. . . . The landscape changed. Cedars came down, in scattered groups, into the valley. Soon the snow-capped crests of hills that we had seen in the distance a few minutes ago were only a few hundred feet above us. Deserted country. No Buriat farmsteads. The mails passed. There is no official type of mail wagon to carry letters and parcels along the long, long trails of Siberia. The black leather sacks are fastened with a glittering steel chain, sealed with a leaden seal, and flung into a *telyega* containing a lot of hay. Among them lolls a post guard, with an official cap and tunic (sometimes even official trousers), and, prominently displayed at the hip, a big revolver holster. Now and then he carries a sword, too. Frequently now, we dived through belts of *taiga* and then right into a forest. "Wolves here!" said the driver, picking out of the hay the big stick that *yemstchiks* take along with them in wolf country, and brandishing it, with a grin, at the gloomy aisles of cedars where trouble lurked. Where the track passed through a clearing

the sun was scorching hot. Up a long slope, and we were crunching through drifted snow. The grass was dead, and the birches and aspens showed no signs of budding, though the pussy-willow was beginning to bloom. From the pass at the divide there was a fine view of the mountains all around, with the jagged snow-streaked Saiyansk peaks in the far southwest. The *obi* at the pass had been pulled to bits and lay at the side of the track, a heap of broken wood, tatters of gaudy rag, and scattered stones—probably the revenge of a Russian tramp who had been rebuffed by the Buriats. What a “road” the next three miles or so; boulders set in hard clay!

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## *Chapter 9*

### THE WAYS OF NORTHERN TIGERS

One of the most curious of the many strange sensations you can experience in Siberia is to sprawl on the turfy bank of a woodland stream just like any place that you know so well in New Jersey or the south of England, and to realize, as you watch the English butterflies flitting from flower to flower of precisely the same species that flourish in every English country lane, that instead of a perky little moor-hen coming out of yonder patch of reeds up-wind, it may part to reveal an enormous tiger.

Tigers, you have got so definitely filed away in your mind, are Indian creatures. They belong down in hot, steamy jungles, among elephants and rajahs and skinny brown men in white turbans and not much else.

Yet, up here, in eastern Siberia, with long winters during which the temperature is way below zero for weeks at a time, are the biggest tigers in

the world. They reach a length of fourteen feet, more than twice the length of a tall man—but that includes, of course, the tail. You don't sit on the top of the highest elephant you can find, accompanied by a gang of similarly exalted friends, when you go out after them. You just walk, following their spoor, in the snow or the marshy ground. The Siberian tiger, too, has a way of following spoor—yours. His chief hunters used to be the officers of the naval and military garrison at Vladivostok, before the World War, but now, as in the case of the small tiger found in southwestern Siberia, very few men attempt to shoot him. Poisoned bait, generally his favourite food, wild boar, is laid in his haunts, during the winter when his skin is in fine condition and fetches a big price, even from the Chinese middlemen who smuggle furs out through Manchuria. You find splendid skins in Shanghai.

Bears and wolves range all over Siberia, north, south, east, and west; so do lynxes. But the tigers have definite regions outside which they are seldom met with.

The small species which is short-haired and rather smudgily striped has his headquarters in the swampy flats around lake Balkash, in the southwest, though he ranges eastward, just south of the Altai mountains, in fairish numbers, all the way to China.

The big, thick-coated, vividly striped fellow lives between the mouth of the Amur river and Korea, ranging westward as far as the Yablonoi mountains, north and south of Tchita. He made a great nuisance of himself when the railway was being built through a certain patch of forest in the Trans-Baikal, raiding the Chinese coolies' camps so often that they struck, and troops had to be fetched to clear the area. Like his Malayan relative, who now and then swims the strip of sea between the mainland and the island of Singapore, he has an un-catlike way of taking to the water at times. On several occasions he has been seen swimming the two- or three-mile-wide Amur, in the region of Blagovestchensk.

There is no reason why he should not range clear across to the Urals, but none of the old-

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established settlers of whom I made enquiries remembered any case of his being found west of lake Baikal. There was one famous old Ussuri tigress about fifty years ago, who turned her back on the Pacific and started out to circumnavigate the globe. She got within sight of Baikal before she was shot, but since then no tigers have been seen much west of Tchita.

I was shown an interesting old Russian record describing a mass trek northward of Ussuri tigers, which took them, in a few weeks, hundreds of miles from their usual haunts. The hero of this rout was—the mosquito. There was a particularly bad mosquito year, when the Ussuri woods were so full of dense swarms that the settlers kept mistaking them for clouds of smoke from forest fires. They drove the tigers frantic, and off the poor beasts moved to the dry uplands of Manchuria, where they stayed until the cold weather came.

The Siberian tiger has a ghoulish trick of digging up graves, and in many villages between Vladivostok and Korea an old man is appointed night watchman of the cemetery, where he sits,

with a gun, in a stoutly built little log hut, from dusk to dawn.

A couple of centuries ago the Siberian tiger was the quarry of the "Sons of Heaven" who ruled the Celestial East. Ambrose Ismailov, the guest of Kam Hi, relates that that sporting old Emperor had been accustomed to go riding after tiger through the forests of Tartary armed only with a sharp spear or two. He rode a horse, not an elephant. "A man must be well mounted and armed," he remarked to Ismailov, "who hunts this kind of animals in the woods, where they be strong and swift." One can well believe it!

When Ismailov visited Tartary, the Emperor was getting on in years and was no longer in training, but he sent plucky young men out to trap tigers and bring them back. On February 21, 1721, the Russian rode six miles southwest of Peking to the gates of the Imperial game park at Chay-za. The Emperor had passed the night in a pavilion about a mile beyond, surrounded by nearly a thousand tents, in which were his nobles and chieftains. After breakfast Kam Hi sent a mes-



sage that he would like to have a look at Ismailov's gun. The weapon was returned after a short time, the messenger bringing several of the Emperor's own guns, for his guest to examine. They were all matchlocks.

Then a start was made. The Son of Heaven sat cross-legged in a litter slung on the shoulders of four bearers. By his side lay a fowling-piece, a bow, and a sheaf of arrows. Now and then he released a hawk, in pursuit of a pigeon.

The party covered about twenty miles before lunch. After the meal, Kam Hi sent two of his chief eunuchs to convey his compliments to Ismailov and to tell him that a tiger baiting was now going to be held in his honour. Three tigers had been trapped for the occasion.

It was a risky proceeding, for there was no sunken arena, or "bull-ring," high above which the spectators could look on in safety. The Emperor's tent was pitched on a little hill, and those of the ambassador and the rest of the party on a slope, surrounded by guards with long spears.

A man on a fast horse rode up to the cage and

pulled a rope which lifted a door. Out strolled a tiger. The horseman galloped away for all he was worth, but the tiger was so pleased to be out in the open air again that he paid no heed to him but merely rolled about in the grass. Probably he was purring, too, though Ismailov was not near enough to hear. At last, after a good sprawl, he noticed that there were men all over the place. He got up, growled (Ismailov vividly remembered that growl when he came to write up his log of the day's happenings!) and strode uneasily about, scenting trouble. The Emperor had two shots at him, from matchlocks, but missed. Then he suggested that the ambassador might like a shot. "Safety first" was Ismailov's motto. He walked toward the tiger, surrounded by ten men armed with spears, in case of accidents, and, firing at easy range, killed him.

The second tiger was released in the same way, and, like the first, had a good roll in the grass, from which he was rudely aroused by a shot with a blunted arrow, fired by the horseman. That started something right away. The resentful tiger went after his tormentor with such speed and prompti-

rude that the horseman had a very close call; he had only just time to gallop through the gap in the ranks of the pikemen that opened for him when the big beast sprang, only to be impaled on the spears and pointed stakes of the guards below.

The third tiger did not roll in the grass when they released him. He started straight for the hill on which stood the Emperor, sprang at the pikemen, and was speared to death. After supper Kam Hi sent round to his Russian guest the skin of the beast which he himself had shot. . . .

The little village of Perevalovskaya was neat and clean. Nowhere in the world have I seen such contrasts in agricultural villages as in Siberia; one is always "kept guessing" as to whether nightfall will find one in a squalid, sullen, verminous collection of tumble-down hovels, or a group of spruce log shacks adorned with white-painted fretwork and window-sills, and pots of flowers and ferns in the windows. In the postmaster's room there was actually an upholstered sofa; an array of *ikons* and a map advertisement of a farm machinery company were on the walls.

For the next stage I had a Khalka Mongol as driver. Just as we were leaving the village a small boy ran down from a hillside, shouting, "Automobile! An automobile is coming!" The vast majority of the horses of the Trans-Baikal steppes have not yet seen a motor car, and *yemstchiks* find it healthier to pull right away from the track to get a clear field for the bolt that often ensues at their first encounter. My man turned at right angles and flogged the horses into a gallop. We were a couple of hundred yards out on the steppe when round the last bend in the hills came a big touring car, packed with about a dozen passengers—officers, men in official caps, women and children. I discovered at the next village that one of the party, who had come from Urga, down in Mongolia, had been bitten by a mad dog and was being rushed up, with all speed, to the railway, en route for Tomsk, where Pasteur treatment is available.

Rabies is one of the ever-present dangers in Siberia and is frequently spread by mad wolves which bite the dogs of the nomad native herders

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of horses, cattle, and sheep. Smallpox, too, and typhus and typhoid often ravage a village without receiving any more attention than they used to have in Western Europe in the Middle Ages. "Contacts" are not isolated, and the patients are just put to bed and kept warm, until they die or recover. The sick room is not fumigated afterwards, nor is the dirty paper money in the dead man's pocket destroyed. It was best not to let one's mind dwell on these matters. True, there is very little danger to be anticipated from wild beasts, while ranging about Siberia, but with even the elements of hygiene unknown by the peasants, Death is always lurking just round the corner—and often the nearest doctor is anywhere from a couple of hundred to more than a thousand miles away.

Sporadic outbreaks of cholera and plague, too, often occur, without ever being heard of. From such causes whole roving groups of nomadic natives, comprising many scores of men, women, and children, are wiped out. There was one dreadful case in which two little Kirghiz Tartar girls, about ten years old, and the baby brother of one

of them, were found wandering in the snow in a village street, one afternoon. Their whole encampment had been killed by plague. They signed their death warrant when they described to the villagers the symptoms of the illness. Plague, at all events, that village knew, for some of the men had been in Kharbin during the terrible outbreak of 1910. They told the children that a friend was waiting for them down the trail, a few versts. And out into the sea of snow, in the gathering dusk, hand in hand, trudged the three youngsters. Huddled up closely to each other they were found next day, by the side of the track, frozen to death. Very dreadful, but, as the peasant exclaimed who told me of the affair, "What could we do! If we had taken them in all our village, too, might have been wiped out." A few years ago, Asiatic cholera broke out at several points in Leningrad itself, and the municipal authorities gave stringent orders for the scattering of disinfectant powder in open drains. An extraordinary panic ensued when the rumour started, and spread like wild-fire, that the specks of powder themselves were the dreaded "little in-

sects" called choleras. Hundreds of peasants hastily evacuated quite untainted houses, and thousands more refused to visit friends in whose yards were drains along which could be seen swarming myriads of little choleras! . . .

We passed through hilly country, now bare, now wooded with firs and pines; and over two passes where drifted snow choked the track, into which all the several pairs of wheel ruts converged. On stretches of bad track, where stones abound, wheeled traffic moves out, to right and left. It looks odd to see eight or ten of them out on a wild expanse of steppe without a dwelling or a person in view. When the main track improves, or where it passes through a steep-sided gully, the "sidings" all run in to one again.

Late one afternoon, as I was returning north through this region, I found the broad-wheeled track of one or more of the carts that had passed that way hundreds of years ago when Muscovy and Peking were exchanging caravans of wares. The slant of the sun's rays showed the ripple-like ruts, about four inches deep, throwing a slight

shadow where the grass was shorter. Between the ruts, since those horses or camels had passed, a pine cone had sprouted and become a great tree.

Just as the sun was setting, we crossed the last ridge and saw, some versts ahead, the sheen of a bend of the Selenga. Down toward it sank a broad treeless valley fringed by snow-topped hills. The distant view was impressive. Six or eight mountain ranges lay ahead, in a semi-circle, one behind the other, and a score of conspicuous peaks. Tier upon tier they rose, with the great wall of the Saiyansk range, over in Mongolia, a pale detailless background, towering over all.

The *yemstchik* stopped and clambered down to adjust the harness. Taking the swinging pot of grease from its hook under the wagon, he anointed the axles, in preparation for the long run over appallingly bumpy ground, down to Ust Kíakhta. The glow from the sinking sun made him look like a red Indian. A tinkle of bells as the horses threw up their heads. Then utter silence, broken presently by the thin, twitter of a belated lark and the "peewit" of a distant plover. Now all



those mountains were pale rose—and then, suddenly, black. . . . Night was falling fast, and the *yemstchik* raced against it, at a gallop, for most of the way.

It was dark when we came round the corner of the little white church and into the courtyard of the post house. A veterinary surgeon, just off on vacation, was spending the night here. We had a bench each, on opposite sides of the padded hall. He asked me to drink vodka with him and brought out a pint bottle. He pretended to refuse to believe in my nationality. "No! No!" he averred. "You're no Anglitchanin! Englishmen have moustaches so!"—and with profuse gesturing he imitated long droopers of face foliage, and Dundrearies. We played at drawing pigs with our eyes shut, and the stable lads joined us. Fearful and wonderful indeed were the pigs we limned. And there was a great spate of talk—Latin, French, German, and Russian. . . . "*Posmotri! Posmotri!*" shouted my companion to the Eskimo-faced Buriat grooms. "Look! Look! You know-nothings! *Mensa!*" He brought his hand down on the

table with a loud, demonstrative smack. "*Mensa—stol* (a table)!" And "*corpus*, a body," and "*caput*, a head," he demonstrated by punching them behind the shoulders and smacking their heads. He admired my fishing tackle very much, and I gave him some of it, as he was going to spend part of his holidays angling. Siberian hooks and lines are very primitive; practically all the lake and river fishing is done with nets. The Buriats had their reward when I inveigled him into thrusting both his thumbs into a Japanese plaited bamboo bark thumb trap that I had among the toys in my pack. It was quite a while before he realized that any amount of tugging would not get him loose. And then to our benches and blessed sleep. . . .

I admired the poise of the "Doctor," as they called him. He obviously had a headache, when we rose at six and had tea. But he was patient and witty with a quaint little black-and-white Chinese spaniel which he had been petting the night before, when, in a lamentable display of jealousy, she barked and snarled because he petted a lollopy setter who had found her way in from the yard.

"It's all right!" he assured the little spaniel, with a pat. "This lady has merely come to me for medical advice. She is no friend of mine."

I went out to have a look at the village. It was about the same size as Selenginsk. In a dainty grove of aspens, birches, and larches behind the post house, one heard the cooing of doves and the "woot-woot, woot-woot" call of two unseen birds.

The track to Troitskosavsk was over sand, semi-desert. At first I passed over bare hills, very sparsely grassed and often breaking into naked sand dunes. What was delightfully comfortable journeying for a man in a cart was terribly hard work for the heavy-laden caravan horses; the carcasses of those which had fallen, never to rise again, lay at the side of the trail. Sometimes the skeletons were in as perfect condition as museum specimens, sometimes a mere litter of bones. A raven was tearing at one half-devoured carcass. A sparrow perched, twittering, on the blenched upcrooked hoof of another.

Then through woods of pine and cedar. Where

the sun fell on a warm knoll the birches were budding, but not in the glades where the snow had lain longest. I passed several caravans laden with pots and pans and pails, and crates; the *yemstchik* waded through the sand alongside the carts, urging on the panting horses. Up the side of a mountain where stunted pines grew in the sand. From the ridge I expected to be able to look down into the new country, but the trail merely curved round under another ridge. A few minutes later, however, came the straggling log cottages of the outskirts of the last little town in Siberia. A white church. Green-roofed white buildings. A domed cathedral—and, beyond, at last, Mongolia.

Before the western world knew anything of China but the entries in Marco Polo's diary, before the British, and Dutch, and Portuguese merchants began to send ships up into the China seas, cumbrous caravan embassies were crawling to and fro through the steppes, and forests, and mountains of Siberia and the Mongolian Desert of Gobi, between the tsars of Muscovy and the emperors at Peking. Then venturesome Russian merchants be-

gan to follow in their train. After a while it was found more advantageous for Muscovite and Chinese to meet north of the Gobi. Finally, in 1727, imperial commissioners from Moscow and Peking met at Kiakhta, and signed a treaty that formally recognized this spot as the frontier of the two empires and the clearing-house for the produce of northern Occident and Orient.

A strip of neutral territory, two hundred and forty yards wide, was marked out, to divide China from Siberia, and at each side a *sloboda*, or stockaded cantonment, was erected. Between the two forts rose a pair of wooden columns, nine feet high—the frontier posts.

To Kiakhta the merchants from Muscovy brought bales of cloth and mirrors, tinware and ironware, a sprinkling of most of the manufactured goods of Europe, and, surreptitiously, quantities of furs, the export of which was forbidden. The Chinese brought silks and damasks, satins and dressed leather, gauzes and crêpes, gold thread and velvet, tobacco and porcelain, tea and ginger, crystallized orange-peel and aniseed, pipes and arti-

ficial flowers, dolls and wooden combs, books and trinkets, pearls and brandy, flour and pepper, fans and silken girdles. The Chinese were the smarter men of business. A foreign office official sent from Peking, in conjunction with a Russian foreign office official, decided all disputes arising from the bartering transactions, and they were kept pretty busy. So great a drain on Russian precious metal was the outgo of coins at Kiakhta that soon a *ukase* forbade the passing of any money at the frontier.

That did not bother the canny traders. They had pure gold cast in the shape of candlesticks, images of Buddha, knives, and what not, and swapped *them* for Chinese wares.

Soon the trade in tea became by far the most important. Eighty years ago practically all the tea consumed in Europe and America came from Kiakhta, caravan after caravan of it toiling and stumbling across Siberia from the northern frontier of China. Subsequently Kiakhta received two shattering blows. The treaty ports of China were thrown open for international trade. The Trans-

Siberian Railway came to link Russia with Manchuria in the North, and Manchuria with Peking. But great trade is still done in other wares, mostly hides, and cattle and grain from Mongolia. A good deal of tea, too, still comes through.

Of recent years Siberia has been developing this little outpost. Thirty years ago it was a village. Today it is a good-sized town, or, rather, two towns, three miles apart, their suburbs fusing into one. In a narrow, steep-sided valley that separates two sinking spurs of the pine-clad sandy mountain to the north is Troitskosavsk, the residential and retail trading quarter. Up on the hillsides swarm log cottages. Down in the valley, fringing a sandy brook that sparkles down from the mountains, are the houses of the well-to-do, and a welter of schools and administrative buildings, churches, and shops. The churches and public buildings are walled with whitewashed stone or cement, and roofed mostly with pale sea-green-coloured tinplate. Houses are massively built of logs, flanked by spacious stockaded courtyards, on to which the doors open. Elaborate carvings cover their eaves

and shutters, and a pretentious carved archway tops the gates of the yard. Outside the shops are displayed painted pictures of the wares within. Especially rich in variety are the cross-section pictures of sausages. One wonders whether the fertility of invention of the sign-painter put the sausage-maker on his mettle and caused him to create the multitude of specimens on his shelves, or vice versa.

Some sections of pavement in Troitskosavsk are stone-flagged instead of having the omnipresent raised wooden dais that usually skirts the chief streets of Siberian towns. And—rare evidence of budding municipal pride in this new land's slovenly towns—little birches and larches have been planted along each side of the main street.

It is the last week in May, but these saplings are only just beginning to bud. The thicket of trees lining the brook that trickles through a little gorge past the cathedral has not yet shown a speck of green. Look closer, and you will see that a yard of mud-covered ice has yet to melt before a sun-beam can attempt to battle with the chill around



their frozen roots. The weather is hot and the days have been warm for nearly a month. Today it is close on to 80° F. in the shade. But it takes time to get through the legacies of snow and ice left by a seven-month winter, mostly of far under zero temperature.

The wealthy tea-importers of a generation or two ago have done their duty by the town. At a cost of 2,000,000 roubles they built the gorgeous cathedral and gave it solid silver two-hundred-pound doors. The altar of gold and platinum and silver, all excavated from the Siberian mines, cost 400,000 roubles. Chandeliers studded with diamonds and rubies and emeralds droop over the worshippers, and gem-encrusted *ikons* hang on the walls. Yet so ramshackle is the best hotel in town that my bedroom door has no handle, and is festooned with a loose bit of rusty chain that always leaves it three inches ajar when "locked" to the staple in the wall. It need hardly be added that there was money in the tea-trade. Nempshinov, who put up a mausoleum for himself on a vacant plot at the side of the main road through Treit-

skosavsk, at a cost of 350,000 roubles, was worth 10,000,000. It took work, of course, to amass this pile, the said work consisting mainly of strolling down to his warehouses in the afternoon, say the townsfolk, and seeing that the chests and bales were not leaking.

There is other easy money to be made here. You can hardly call it begging, for the practitioners of this profession ask for nothing. Any one in rags and tatters who enters a shop and makes a bee-line for the cashier is automatically handed a small coin. There is no cringing or whining to get it, and no bow or smile when it is received. Not a word passes on either side. When the tatterdemalion—sometimes Russ, more often Mongol—has thus visited eight or nine shops he has enough capital to keep him in food or lodging for the next four-and-twenty hours, for it costs very little to exist as a tramp hanger-on in the bazaars. There must be something rather jolly about work—granted, in small doses—or why should any one here bother to work?

This northern gateway into mysterious Central

Asia, those blank spaces on the map out beyond the Gobi Desert's vast wastes, is a town of four nationalities in the main—Russian and Buriat, Khalka Mongol and Chinese. And get clear about the Mongols. Many of us have a slack way of terming Chinese "Mongols." Quite wrong. The Mongols, the nomadic herdsmen who thinly people the sterile wildernesses of the northern "back blocks" of China, are entirely another race. Some of their khanates (tribes) have not even the almond eye of the eastern Asiatic.

The Khalkas, for instance, to whom belong most of the Mongols north of the Gobi, are sun-tanned to the reddish-brown complexion of Choc-taw Indians, but numbers of those whose occupations have kept them out of the sun look like Englishmen or Americans. They do not wear pigtaails, of course. They are usually clean-shaven, and their hair they keep close-cropped.

In the middle of the town, under the slope occupied by the cathedral and the fire station's wooden watch-tower, is an open space where

townspeople amuse themselves. There is a merry-go-round always at work. It carries a motley crew—Siberian peasant wenches in gay print frocks and with pink or yellow or blue kerchiefs over their heads; little Buriats, with straight black hair, more moon-faced than the generality of Japanese, but resembling them; young Russian hobbledoys, and Chinese clerks with queues flying out in the breeze behind their chaste grey Homburg hats, as the merry-go-round throws out the throttle and rumbles round at full speed, amid the cacophonous crash of drum and dulcimer, blaring brass and strident sackbut and psaltery.

Passing Mongols rein in their wiry little horses and cluster in groups afoot.

Over yonder is the town's cinema—the very last movies before, having crossed the great empty wilds of mid-Asia, you get down into India. Darjeeling, I believe, has the next picture palace—some two thousand miles southwest as the crow flies. A four-reel Vitagraph picture is the *pièce de résistance* here just now—a good enough film in

its way, but much less interesting than the real-life film you can see by strolling about outside in the sunshine.

The Siberians themselves are a picturesque crew, the peasants and their womenfolk in crudely woven homespun and garish prints, men in shirts of scarlet or electric blue, women a-scream with primary colours, like macaws from the Amazon. There are supposed to be seven women in Siberia who are "easy to look at." I think I passed one in a crowd at Irkutsk three years ago. As a school-girl, the Siberian flapper is dressed with severe simplicity in ugly frocks and orphan-asylum hats. When her hair goes up and her skirts go down and she has a little pocket-money of her own, she rigs herself up in a sort of kit in which girls from the pickle-factory went to Coney Island twenty years ago. She becomes the arch-frump of Christendom, poor dear.

Soldiers swarm in this town. They are sensibly dressed. Instead of the senselessly cramping jacket of our troops, these men wear a short khaki blouse-

shirt, epaulettes with their regimental identification, and not tucked into the trousers.

Along the deep-rutted rusty roads long lines of cumbersome little two-wheeled carts are coming and going. With a horse caravan you need have only one driver to eight or ten carts; the rest jog along without urge or lead. The oxen are revolutionaries—they want to throw off their yoke; they have to be tied, the head of each to the tail-board of the cart ahead; and convoy-men afoot have to trudge back and forth, cursing and cracking their whips. . . . Now a couple of Buriat carts pass, driven by flat-faced, high-cheek-boned little men in blue quilted lamp-shade hats topped by a crimson tassel. Now a clattering gun-carriage.

A knot of bronzed Mongols in robes of burned red homespun wearing upturned hats that look like women's peaked fur caps, saucy red and yellow ribbons fluttering from the back, gallop up the hill, from the frontier, to have a glimpse of this new world of which they have heard such strange rumours. . . . More bullock carts, high-

piled with hides. . . . The thud of approaching hoofs—here comes an important man, dashing along in a light carriage, drawn, as though it were a feather, by three high-steppers galloping abreast. How essentially Russian these *troikas* are! No other land on earth would tolerate the disturbing of the traffic in this manner. When a *troika* is going hell-bent-for-election—as *troikas* frequently are—everything has to give way to them, as though they were fire-engines.

Round a corner, at a swift jog-trot, slouch four camels. Probably you have never seen a camel hurry. That is the worst of our zoos and menageries. They give such totally erroneous impressions of the personality of so many of the poor brutes imprisoned there. Pencil-scrawled on one of those terribly poky dens in the pre-war Antwerp Zoo was this apt couplet:

“Cooped in these little pens and cages

You’d never guess we can run like blazes!”

The synthesis is a little twisted, but it voices a great truth. I’ve remembered it more than once in

the jungle, particularly when watching pythons after dark, with an acetylene lamp. But I digress. *Revenons à nos chameaux!*

The shaggy two-humped Bactrian camels run in the unsteady, pot-walloping manner of a puppy that is just finding its feet. . . . They look, as the overworked charladies say, "put upon"—which they certainly are. Life is one long burden to them. That is their only *raison d'être*. These camels of the Mongolian caravans, who know what hard work is, have not that supercilious "pass along to the monkey-house and be damned to you!" look of the bean-fed lotus-eaters in Regent's Park and the Bronx.

About a third of the traffic turns off the main road into the bazaar, a place of jumbled booths and dens and sheds on the bank of the town brook.

If you buy meat—or pretty well anything else—here, you have to take it away in your hands, gore or no gore. Paper costs money, and is scarce in this land of rare newspapers. Chinese in blue are selling leeks that they have brought up the hill from the market-garden patches outside the mud



walls of Maimatchin, the first Mongolian town just across the frontier strip of No Man's Land. The leek is almost the only green stuff being vended. A couple of Russian boys stroll by, a leek held in the right hand and a stick of toffee in the left, taking alternate bites of each.

Odd mixtures of things are being sold from the dusty trays outside the booths—sweets and empty brass rifle cartridge-cases, eggs and broken bits of stag-horn (used, ground to powder, for medicinal purposes), leeks and Bibles. Men saunter up to have their pet pipe-bowl fitted to another stem; you select a pierced rod, and the booth-keeper saws it off to the length you choose.

In the bazaar there are specialized backwaters of trade. The bread-sellers cluster together in their own *quartier*, the meat men, the padlock sellers, the cart menders in theirs. Some day I shall come out to Mongolia again, from the West, with a couple of wagons, to collect padlocks—just one of each kind. Padlocks, paradoxically, loom large in the life of a race of nomad roamers of the wilderness. When your belongings are very few, but im-

portant, you take good care of them. If a race lives in tents its valuables and pretty-pretty things live in chests. . . . Here I find English and American padlocks, French, and Russian, and German. Brass and gleaming steel, dull wrought iron, and enamelled who knows what. The Mongol has sense—he mistrusts the enamelled ones. He prefers a big steel lock when he can afford to patronize European markets. There are Chinese padlocks in the shape of fishes and frogs and dogs, and great barrels and cubes of beaten iron, meet to hold the doors of cathedrals and the gates of walled cities.

A cart, in these parts, is a solid vehicle, but it seems to need incessant tinkering up. Yonder, in the dust, lie the wherewithals—hanks of rope and twine and cord, scraps of angled ironwork and slabs of sheet-iron, pins of wood and nuts of metal; crudely shaped roots and forked branches of trees; mats of woven willow bark and beaten yak wool felt; massive bullock cart-wheels made in six clumsy segments of a near-circle; skeins of plaited pony-hair.

A dismounting group of Mongols have arrived

to shop. They tie their little horses to hitching-posts. I go round the bazaar with them. They want necessities first. Chips of flint go into the steel-keeled tinder purses dangling from their girdles. The huge discs of black bread, as big as cartwheels, are strung up in nets behind their peaked saddles. Back at the booths, they linger to glance at the fripperies of the Occident, marvelling, no doubt, at the amazing number of useless things with which a white man chooses to encumber his existence. Presently they come upon a tool-booth—knives and axes, pincers and saws, vises and nails, files and chains. How pleased they are! What wonderful tools are these, compared with the crude productions of their own smiths! Their faces light up. Jabbering and gobbling like turkeys, they run their fingers down the blades and wrench appreciatively at the chains. Good stuff! These white men know a thing or two!

When they leave the bazaar they wander up and down the town, seeing what they shall see and hearing what they shall hear. A group gathers outside a shop where a gramophone is libelling Strauss.

Two find a drain that crosses under the road, and, dropping on their knees in the dust, peer through like a couple of urchins, then call to their comrades to come and see this neat contrivance.

Along the main street of Troitskosavsk I come to the last white man's shop this side of Asia—it sells bicycles and *samovars*, guns and machines that cook and talk and sew—and pass a little church. The graves of the wealthier dead outside are embowered in roofed summer-houses hung with festoons of bedraggled paper flowers. The sun beats fiercely down on the white dust in the road, from which glint wheel-polished surfaces of dark hard rock that flash back the light like dropped bits of mirror. It is pleasant to rest a moment under a wayside sycamore where a peasant girl is selling *kvas*. Late in May, and not a branch is budding yet; yet somehow the spot seems cooler than the road.

How wonderful the air is, up here in the sun on the high plateau! Dry, invigorating, deliciously turf-scented, like the high veld of Rhodesia. One is *alive* here.

A beetle, clad garishly in cherry pink and emerald green, alights in my glass, swims to safety, combs its antennæ, and booms down-breeze again. . . . That man driving by in a rubber-tired rig—a rarity hereabouts—is wearing a sun-helmet. When he takes an after-dinner stroll this evening he will be wearing his coat and gloves of fur, and his breath will be steaming in the chill air. There are still night frosts. . . .

An interlude of stoning dogs. It is not healthy to tolerate sniffing and dribbling dogs around you in Siberia. Mad wolves lurk in the forests and often bite dogs. I was given a hair-raising account of a mad wolf that was found snoozing in front of the stove in a log cabin over Baikal way. The man and his wife were out, working in the fields. Three toddling children were playing alongside it. "*Sabachka spat*" ("Doggie asleep"), they explained when the parents came in, adding that he wouldn't play, and growled when they thumped him; so they reckoned he was tired and let him rest. The man promptly gave him a charge of shot that imparted a permanence to his slumber.

Puffs of wind sweeping down from the sandy mountain-side to the west raise miniature dust-devils along the road. One is coming now, licking up the grit and dust in its path. Through a rift I catch a glimpse of shining steel—bayonets—and above, here and there, a camel's head, looming bodiless as Alice's Cheshire Cat at its penultimate gasp, above the drab cloud. A few seconds pass. . . . Then, with the full-throated roar of a swinging marching chant, troops emerge.

We huddle, a well-mixed company, at the roadside to let them pass—a couple of caravans of ox-drawn carts; stray wayfarers, blinking and coughing from the dust; a herd of goats; a Ford car; Chinese coolies burthened with great baskets of leeks and horrors ripped from the insides of fowls; two big high-school girls in demure white pinnies; red-robed Mongols, reining in their horses; a yellow-hatted *lama*, and a twisted skein of camels crowding around a lazy comrade who has lain down in the road and is squealing his determination to see himself sifting cinders in Tophet before he'll get up. . . . Through the smoke of

dust the leather-throated troops swing by with rhythmic tread.

Half a mile on, I cross a bridge over the brook. Now I am in Kiakhta, where the Siberian merchants hoard their imports and transact their business. Big painted and carven log cottages in stockaded yards, iron-shuttered, line the road; a little *sad* (garden) of birches and larches; white-washed administrative offices; a silver-domed church on a hillock. A few yards farther, and, suddenly—there is the frontier. To right and to left a black-and-white striped sentry-box; ahead, a strip of scantily-grassed sand. This is the famous Kiakhta neutral belt, once the chief trade *entrepôt* of northern Asia.

Over yonder, about twice as far as you could throw a stone, a long, low line of tiled roofs, with upturned gables, on which squat baked-clay dragons and bogey-dogs and snarly little “divvles” that are neither beast nor man, but symbolical scarers-off of even worse, invisible devils who bring to a Chinese home disease and bad luck—the Chi-

nese merchants' settlement in Maimatchin. And all Mongolia beyond.

Yonder, with no more transition or intermediate zone, clean-cut, are the huddled mysteries of China and Mongolia—another world.

The routine of life, the domestic round, play, chatter, notions about life and death, are pretty much the same, if you lift off a couple of roofs and peer in, anywhere between Norway and Rumania, though thousands of miles intervene. Here, scared at their impact, East and West have each stepped back a stone's throw. If you lifted off two roofs here, just to right and just to left, how utterly different a scene, a mental setting!

The Chinese have erected a large evil-spirit screen before the gap in the wall on their side through which you pass into Mongolia, to bar the gaze of unknown bogeys dwelling among the white men. Prudent Celestials! . . .



## Chapter 10

### MYSTERIOUS LAMASERAIS

I visited several of the lonely *lamaserais* of the southern Trans-Baikal. Most of them are situated many miles away from a frequented trail or a Russian village. It is difficult to convey the vivid sense of "creepiness," as children say, that a foreigner feels when, alone, unprotected and unintroduced, he approaches one of these mysterious haunts of mysterious monks from the unmapped wilds of Central Asia.

It is not at all like going along, for instance, with a guide and a group of chattering companions, to see the Taj Mahal, or the Pyramids, or Angkor. Nor is it like going into the Papuan jungle or the Eskimo country, to discover settlements of semi-savages. One is not merely a condescending foreigner; one is an extra-planetary visitor, a wayfarer to another world where men of literary and æsthetic culture, and immensely old

traditions, live a sequestered life based on knowledge, faith, and theory quite other than our own. Most races are either ignorant savages, subservient to the white man where their paths cross, or, to a considerable extent, internationalized, with the same sort of daily routine, that educated man can understand whether he knows the language, or not.

But these remote colonies of *lamas* are Up to Things, as a Wells character would say. Mighty queer things. Things that go on in the night. Things that go on in underground labyrinths. Weird rituals and experiments that no monk dares to reveal and no white traveller has yet discovered—and lived to put on record. . . . There is that unpublishable journal of Gregorin that his father kept in a strong-box at Irkutsk. It was to be sent to the Imperial Academy of Arts and Sciences at Leningrad when the old man died, but he was killed in the rioting that occurred after the break-up of the "White" army in 1918, and no one knows who has got it now, or whether, indeed, it still exists. Eleven years young Gregorin was kept

a prisoner, after he had been kidnapped as a lad of eighteen or nineteen, at a *lamaserai* which specialized in physiological research. There have been significant admissions, made in the delirium of fever, by Mongol patients treated by Russian doctors. And a famous German hypnotist brought out to eastern Siberia by the Governor-General of the Trans-Baikal obtained valuable data from *lamas* who afterward disappeared.

Mankind originated in Central Asia, and the hoard of "lost knowledge" accumulated there is astounding. Its keepers are the monasteries, as the monasteries of mediæval Europe were the keepers of the early knowledge of the western world. But whereas these "universities" of the Occident spread their knowledge, those of Central Asia have taken pains, with all the patience, assiduity, and guile so characteristic of the Oriental, to keep their discoveries to themselves. Their traditional instinct for thousands of years has been to secrete their most wonderful inventions, their medical and psychical discoveries, to be gloated over in privacy by the higher ranks of their learned hierarchy. The

very idea of spreading this secret knowledge is as revolting to them as the notion of scattering baskets of thousand-dollar bills from the window would be to the officers of a conservative financial corporation in Wall Street. It is just a point of view, you see—a kind of mysticism of science, woven into the warp and woof of the mysticism of the earliest religion. Nowhere but out in these remote little settlements, away in the middle of Asia, thousands of miles from the sea and its prying traders, aloof from contact with the rest of mankind, could such a scheme of things have survived.

Knowing what I did of the queer games that the *lamaserais* have been known to play with lone white men, I used to feel a strange thrill in approaching them. So, in all probability, did the pictures of New York skyscrapers and electric torches in the pack on my back, at the thought of the interest they were soon to arouse.

It was after a long trudge through the forested uplands west of Ust-Kaikhta that I sighted the first one which I intended to look over.

Ahead, down a glade in the fir trees, there was a

glimpse of old-gold and green roofs, with uptilted gables, above a high stockade of logs, which I later found to be about a quarter of a mile long, by a little less broad. There were no windows or doors in the stockade, and it turned in like a funnel where one entered, so that, from a plank terrace inside, a warm reception could be given to unwelcome invaders. Once inside I found myself in a sort of grassy field, where, dotted about, were some scores of weatherworn old huts, shacks, and temple buildings. Massive padlocks of bizarre design dangled from the bars of some of the doors, and some of the windows were of strong latticed ironwork.

I wandered about for a minute or two, seeing nobody, but feeling that I must be observed. Then I mounted the steps of a shack and knocked. There was no reply. I opened the door and saw it was a little temple. There was an altar at the far end, with small bowls of offerings before it. I did not care to enter before I had introduced myself to some one in authority in the settlement. As I closed the door and turned, I heard a shout of alarm. A

*lama*, standing about a hundred yards away, was looking at me. He turned and ran, his red robes flapping in the breeze.

A few seconds later, round the corner of a row of buildings came running a mob of *lamas*.

"Now," I told myself, "you are in for Trouble." I had my tiny German revolver and a bulb-handled pistol firing strong ammonia, but they were for solitary encounters. This was not the moment for displaying or using a weapon. I sat down on the steps, with an air of nonchalance that I was far from feeling, with my empty hands, conspicuously displayed, clasped over my knees.

Seeing that I was not going to make a bolt for it, and did not seem inclined to show fight, the *lamas* ceased running. A few yards away they stopped and gabbled questions at me, scowling unpleasantly. "I am an Englishman," I said in Russian, with a smile. "I am walking about the world, to see it. I am no thief. . . . Look!" I added, taking the cigarette out of my mouth. "A good cigarette—very good cigarette. I have many more for my friends." And beckoning them to come

closer, I unslung the pack from my back and opened it. I took out a dozen pale-green packets of *Zephyrs* and distributed them among the numerous hands which were held out. I had only one box of matches, and there was a stiff breeze blowing. By the time we had all managed to get a light—cussing when a match blew out and triumphing when we got each successive cigarette lit, quite a matey atmosphere had been established. I quickly proceeded to dig myself in, in their confidence, by displaying the Woolworth Tower as my little old ancestral home. It was a good impressive postal card, about a foot long, folded into three sections. I marked with a pencil two windows about the forty-fifth storey. "Those are *my* rooms," I explained. Then I marked the windows of my father's apartment, and those of my Aunt Elisaveta.

To say that the Woolworth tower "went big" is to understate the case very considerably. Three storeys in the Trans-Baikal is a skyscraper. The *lamas* pushed and shoved to get close enough to see this extraordinary house and examine its tiers

and tiers of windows. How they gabbled! A diversion was caused by the arrival of a monk of higher rank, who had to be told all about it. For his benefit I produced a coloured postal card of the Singer Building and one of the Equitable. He scrutinized them with keen interest.

"May I see the temple?" I asked, waving toward the biggest building. "Here is my passport." And I took out from my inner breast-pocket the more imposing of my two auxiliary passports—the mortgage of Hildebrand the Hittite, with the big gold seal bearing the signature of Vernon the Viceroy. That ornate document put me on a basis of sound respectability, and during the rest of my stay at the *lamaserai* I was treated as an honoured guest. Only once did I have to be rebuked for a breach of etiquette. That was when I happened to be smoking as we entered a field that did not look any holier than the rest of the settlement but apparently was, for the old monk who accompanied me politely indicated in dumb show that one ought not to smoke there. When we passed out of the gateway on the other side he signed to me by



gesture that one might now light up again here.

It was a thrilling moment when I followed the monk, who had gone to fetch a huge key, into the large temple. The place looked from outside like one of those great ice-houses along the shores of the Hudson river. We entered not by the wide flight of stone steps leading up to the main entrance doors, but by a little door at the left-hand corner of the main façade. The windows were small, and the hall was in gloom. Long rows of oblong raised platforms ran out as pews in our churches do, but endways on to the altars at the far end. The roof was held up by some thirty or forty square pillars of wood, painted red. There were cushions on the platforms to make the squatting more comfortable. Here and there were prayer-wheels and big drums. By the altars were tiger-skin rugs and one of a leopard pelt. There were big conch shells, brought up across Asia all the way from the beaches of the Indian ocean. Holy pictures were on the altars and the silk-hung wall behind, and, before them, numbers of small bowls of porcelain and brass, containing grain, oil,

and various curious-looking substances. By the side of one of the altars, in red pigeonholes ranged in tiers in glass-fronted cabinets, were the sacred books, written on strips of parchment, with a strip of wood on each side, to keep the pages flat, and each done up in a cover of yellow or white silk. I counted one hundred and twelve of them. . . .

The *lamas* lived in rows of log shacks, in front of each of which lunched a pole or bough from which the twigs had been lopped off. What at first looked like tattered laundry hung out to dry fluttered from the poles, but I found that each bit of cotton cloth was printed with the hieroglyphs of prayers and texts. The monks were literally obeying Buddha's injunction to spread abroad his words and his worship on the winds of heaven.

I lunched with two *lamas* in a "cell" that was half living-and-sleeping-room, half temple. One of them smoked, even when he walked over to the altar, muttering and making obeisances. The ash of his cigarette fell on the altar, among the little bowls of offerings. He must have seen it, but he was not shocked and did not brush it away. A

beautifully carved screen of wood sheltered the altar alcove, and I expressed, in Russian, my admiration of it. My hosts made deprecatory noises and gestures. One of them went and fetched a friend who spoke Russian. He picked up from a corner what I thought was a holy scroll of some sort and unrolled a yard of it. It was a hideous, cheap wallpaper. "Look!" he said, with the air of a connoisseur showing an art treasure. "It has come from Verknie Udinsk. We are going to paste it up on that screen of wood there!"

We squatted on a low mattress-covered dais and ate lumps of tough mutton from a platter. Our fingers were our knives and forks. The "milk" of our bowls of very hot tea was a lump of raw mutton fat, dumped into each bowl in succession for about a minute, during which time grease separated from the fat and rose in a strong sheepy-smelling scum to the top of the liquid. Then, as dessert, there were Russian candies, each wrapped in flowered paper.

After our meal I rose and walked across the room to examine the altar in the alcove. Before it,



*Top:* BURIAT WRESTLERS; *center:* DEVIL DANCERS OF A BURIAT  
 BUDDHIST LAMASERAI; *bottom:* TERUGUS INDIAN DISTILLERS OF  
 FIRE-WATER (TARASUN) FROM MARE'S MILK. STILLS ON RIGHT,  
 MARKSMEN WITH RIFLE ON CROSSED STICK SUPPORT ON LEFT.  
 FELT AHI (WIGWAM) IN BACKGROUND



as before those in the big temple, I made two long, slow bows. I do not hold with missionaries and other white men who deem it consonant with good manners to saunter up to the altars of non-Christian peoples and merely stare at them without any gesture of reverence. All good men are travelling to the same destination, by various roads. If we expect an Asiatic not to saunter up the aisle of a temple of ours with his hands in his pockets and his hat on his head, it is up to us to pay his holy places the conventional respect that *he* considers seemly. Above the altar was a Buddha in gilt, in a glass case, flanked by two other holy effigies—and, below, among the little bowls of offerings, a cabinet photograph of the *Kbutukhtu*, or Lamaist "Pope," of Urga, a black-moustachioed man in early middle age. On the altar, too, were a cloth of gilded fabric, and tawdry artificial flowers in small porcelain vases. Up to about twenty years ago most of the *lamaserais* under his sway symbolized his presence by a small golden image, but an ingenious Russian photographer persuaded the great man to effect an economy by substituting photographs

and recalling the images. The Lamaist Mongols, I believe, are the only sect in the world who thus revere photographs on their altars.

In the evening, in a neighbouring hut, we had a memorable session, examining the contents of my pack. Two magic boxes "went" particularly well. One was of metal the size of a thin watch, with a closely-fitting disc of tin inside. I placed a little silver coin in it and put on the lid. Then I explained that if three or four *lamas* wanted that coin to disappear, it would. If only two hands were raised, as a token of such a desire, I opened the box showing the coin still there. If three or more were raised, I opened the box upside down—and, lo and behold! the coin had vanished! [The false bottom, a close-fitting tin disc, of course, was covering it.] An excellent little trick if you do it nonchalantly, as if you don't think it more than mildly wonderful, and switch on to another before the requests to let your *lamas* examine the box become insistent. The other box was bigger magic, and, indeed, to this day, I can't quite grip the principle by which it operates—one of those little

gaudy-coloured pasteboard boxes with a sliding drawer in which you place a coin, a piece of sugar, or a scrap of wood. Top and bottom look alike. Close the drawer, wave the box about, open it upside down, and the object has vanished. I explained that *this* magic needed a vote of eight or more before it would work. . . . You should have seen the amazement on those fellows' faces.

The heap plenty big magic of the evening, however, was The Fire that Didn't Hurt You—my electric torch. They blew at the "flame" and, very unwillingly, at first, put a finger on the bulb. They grovelled about on the floor, in dark corners, showing each other how, by a touch of the button, light came and went. I took the torch to pieces, so that they could see that no fire was hidden inside, and that every part was cold. Then I snapped in the battery, screwed on the bulb—and, pftt! there was the fire again.



## *Chapter 11*

### THE DOG PIE, AND OTHER QUEER AFFAIRS

Sauntering about Siberia, where nobody is in a hurry and men talk more of the past than of the future, you hear many an amusing tale of the full-blooded old days when the pioneer bands of Cossacks from Muscovy reached the far side of the Trans-Baikal and began to encounter opposition from the Chinese, who regarded the region as a sort of protectorate.

Neither Muscovite nor Chinese had any established right to claim territory or to levy tribute on the natives, but that did not worry them. There was no formal state of war, nor did either side desire one. They were armed parties of fur traders—and fur grabbers; unscrupulous, but fully awake to the advantages of expediency. If the natives were numerous in a certain district and good shots with a bow, and if the region were a

nasty place in which to cope with an ambush, the party would trade goods for furs. So it would if it were outbound, and expecting to have more furs brought to it on its return trip. But if the grabbing were safe and good, or it did not intend to come back that way, it grabbed.

The natives presently understood the idea and introduced measures of their own, including the excellent plan of pretending, when encountered in small groups in the forest, that they had not so much as a rat-skin and did not know any friend who had, but intimating that they had heard that some good furs were going to arrive in the spring at the junction of the two rivers out yonder. . . . And when the party turned up there it found itself outnumbered by a large gathering of armed natives with whom it would be most unhealthy to start any "monkey business." However, bore as it was to have to pay for the furs, the profits were enormous, and it was pleasanter to loaf and fish for most of the year, in a snug log-cabin camp, than to be on the move all the time. So these camps began to spring up, here and there, and natives

were employed to clear trails through the forest where such were needed.

But the camps held tempting booty for rival parties, in greater strength, so it soon became the custom to fortify them with high stockades. Even then it was good business, however, to starve out a garrison and seize its furs.

At Albazin a strong fort was established by a gang under the leadership of a Polish freebooter named Tchernigovski. He was a pious man who felt that the place ought to have a resident chaplain. Business was quite good enough to stand that slight addition to the overhead expenses. As prospective applicants for the post could not be obtained, an armed gang was sent westward, with instructions to kidnap a priest. It did.

The Chinese fur traders had their eye on Albazin, for all the best sables from the Amur forests were finding their way thither. They besieged it several times but managed to capture it only once after a sporting attempt to bluff them into relinquishing the attempt had been made by Tchernigovski. When the fort's food had almost dis-

appeared and things looked desperate, he sent out to the Chinese leader, with his compliments, a sumptuous, savoury dog pie. The pie weighed fifty pounds and needed three men to carry it. The inference, of course, was that a little old fifty-pound pie more or less made no difference whatsoever to *that* garrison. The commandant of the besiegers took delivery of it with marked courtesy. The following day he sent back the dish and a flowery message of thanks. So highly appreciated, he declared, had been the pie that many of his officers and men had not been able to obtain even the smallest piece. It would be a source of rankling regret to them, to the end of their days, if they could not summon up a memory of the unparalleled pie-making prowess of Mr. Tchernigovski's chef, and thus be in a position personally to bear testimony to his skill. In the circumstances, would not Mr. Tchernigovski favour them with *another* pie, rather larger than otherwise, to enable *every one* to taste a delicious morsel?

That called poor Tchernigovski's bluff—the very last little coterie of assorted mongrels in the

precincts of the fort had gone into that fifty-pound pie. And he knew that if another good-sized pie was not handed over, the besiegers would know that his gang was at the end of its resources. He temporized by sending back a flowery message, conveying his keen gratification at the gastronomical zest with which his chef's *pièce de résistance* had been consumed and the pleasure that it would now give him to have another big pie prepared. But two or three days went by and no pie—big, small, or medium—appeared. Thus heartened, the Chinese besiegers stood their ground, and obtained the bloodless surrender of the fort, allowing the garrison to retain their arms and march off into the forest in return for giving up all the furs instead of burning them.

The dog in Siberia, as in China, has not yet "arrived." Big "yaller dawgs" with a streak—quite a big streak—of wolf in them, are often tolerated, rather than prized, to give warning of the approach of strangers. In the towns there are a certain number of nasty, rabbit-blooded little piebald curs of the type that the dealer had in

mind when, given a detailed description by the woman who wanted to buy one, he replied: "No, mum. We don't keep that kinda dawg—we drownds it!" But dogs of recognized breeds, with even the rudiments of a pedigree, are few and far between. Yet, for all their characteristically Asiatic contempt of the dog, the Siberians do not eat it nowadays, though perhaps their Tartar ancestors did so.

There is an impression abroad that the Chinese are fond of dogs as pets as well as dinner, and that almost every family maintains a snub-nosed little Pekinese. In the course of several stays in China, at numerous points between North Manchuria and the Cantonese region, I have never seen a Pekinese. The best of the not numerous breed have been exported to European fanciers. [Similarly, Spain is now the last place in the world to expect to find first-rate Spanish dancers.] Snarling, curly-tailed watch-dogs of the chow-chow type—usually black—are kept, and the bad temper of European and American specimens is due to countless generations of survival just because of bad

temper. Chow-chows with nice friendly dispositions toward strangers have gone into the stew!

There is an ominous absence in China of what we regard as ordinary mongrel dogs. . . . In the old days, however, the Siberian traders found that a dog with a few amusing tricks readily fetched a good sum, if they took it down to the *entrepôt* at Kiakhta. In consequence a great deal of dog training used to go on in southeastern Siberia, during the long winter months.

The weather talk of backwoods Siberia is strictly unscientific. Prognostications are based on obscure traditional omens. Your peasant host is liable to shake his head emphatically and declare that the thing can't be done for a few days, when, for example, you tell him that you intend to take a certain trail that entails fording a river. Unless you know northern Asia and its little ways you are prone to assume that he has heard from a wayfarer that flood-water is coming down or that the only boat is undergoing some vital vetting. It is much more likely that five crows have recently been seen flying in single file there, that the prairie

marmots were running round in circles at the full o' the moon, or that some other threatening portent has been observed.

Magical stones and incantations, not anti-cyclones in the north Pacific and deep depressions over the Gobi Desert, arrange the impending weather. Faith in the weather stone has been bred into the Siberians for many centuries, and the Empress Anne's ukase prohibiting its use, on account of the economic and agricultural disturbances it caused, by no means gave it its quietus. This valuable talisman for controlling the weather is any stone or hard ball of hair found in the stomach of an animal. If you want rain you have to get up before dawn; the moment the rim of the sun appears above the eastern horizon, you dip the stone in the pure waters of a spring and hold it out toward the East, to reflect the radiance. A rite entailing the dipping of the stone in the blood of a recently killed beast or bird ensures a spell of cool wind; travelling traders and officials used to send ahead one of the retinue, during the oppressive heat of July, to glean tidings of the possessor of



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such a stone and arrange with him to put it to work.

“But why should not a traveller with a well-lined pocket buy a weather stone outright? Or, at any rate, why should not a weather stone be parked at certain villages, along the beaten tracks? And what happened if one worker of the oracle wanted rain and cool weather and another fellow with a stone wanted drought and a heat-wave?” These and other ruthless questions I asked, only to be greeted with shrugs of the shoulders and the evasive or hostile glances that the firm believer in psychic mysteries reserves for the scientific enquirer into natural phenomena. To the third query, peasants replied that the more powerful of the two magic stones prevailed. Some had even seen such contests between two wonder-workers, one of whom wanted rain and one of whom wanted no rain. And, sure enough, next day, there was either (a) rain or (b) no rain. A great idea!

At Yakutsk, apparently, the populace used to consider that one of these magic stones could fix the weather for precisely nine days ahead. Beliefs

like this, of course, arise in unsophisticated communities when "effect" follows cause by a sheer fluke in one or two cases. Doubtless hundreds of other attempts were made to fix the weather for a nine-day period, but the excuse was made that sinister influences were at work, or that simultaneously several other stones were being used to cause different sorts of weather. After all, you can see pretty much the same sort of thing going on when you read interviews with modern meteorological officials who are never at a loss to explain why, when they have predicted, the previous evening, heavy rains and a violent northeasterly gale for the Fourth of July, the day turns out sunny from dawn to dusk, with a light southwesterly breeze. Washington loftily retorts: "Run away and play—you don't understand contrapuntal peripatetic extra-planetary influences." Yakutsk loftily retorts: "Run away and play—you don't understand devils."

Evidently the roots of a belief in the talismanic power of such stones go deep down into the memory of the human race. The Tartars believed

in them many centuries ago, and Attila's Huns, who swept down on eastern Europe, were believed when they declared that they could control the weather by acts of sorcery. A man who knew intimately the negro quarter of Philadelphia assured me that among the talismanic objects treasured by the blackamoors were the hard balls of felt-like hair occasionally found in the stomachs of cattle. The English peasantry, too, used to regard them as talismans. Hedenström, the Swedish explorer, was presented with a weather stone by the people of Verkhoyansk. It was a water-rounded quartz pebble, from the paunch of a wolf.

Nowadays, if you are a high official, a doctor, or a person of special distinction, you are able to send ahead, on long journeys in railroadless parts of Siberia, a person with a government order that the next village must hold fresh horses, or a suitable boat, for you. In the old days the order was given by sending ahead a knotted cord, kept at every remote Cossack outpost. A number of other objects could have been chosen to carry this signal to little communities of natives who could not read and

distrusted, not without reason, verbal messages. But the knotted cord was not merely a message—it was a gentle hint; there were more knotted cords, on a knout handle, where that came from. Strahlenburg had trouble with his men on the long trek from Krasnoyarsk to Tobolsk. His guide deserted, and he expected his five rowers to do likewise. So he dropped in to a Cossack post on the Tchutim river and explained his predicament. “We’ll fix *that* for you,” said the Cossacks. “What you need is one of *these*. Send one of ’em ahead with it—we’ll lend you a small boat for him.” The cord they gave him was about as thick as a finger, with three knots in it.

When he got to the next group of huts a relay of natives was waiting on the bank, ready to take him on, and the cord had already been sent ahead. This happened thenceforth at place after place, until he reached his destination.

Strahlenburg relates a curious story of a knotted cord adventure in the Arctic which may have been a case of deliberate leg-pulling, or a genuine confusion by a group of superstitious natives of the

respective functions of the weather stone and the knotted cord. The master of a vessel at anchor on the coast of Borondei, between the Petchora and Nova Zembla, put some enquiries to the local Samoyedes concerning the course he intended to sail by. They told him that he would encounter several dangerous patches before he could reach the straits of Weigatch, but that if he was in a hurry they would give him a cord with three knots. At the first cape, if he untied one, he would have a fair wind. At the second, if he untied the next knot, he would obtain a stiff breeze. The third knot they advised him not to undo, as by so doing a storm would be brewed that would endanger his ship. The captain did what he was advised to at the first and second capes. But he could not then let well enough alone. His curiosity led him to untie the third knot—and he got his gale all right! Had he not had the luck to find a sheltered inlet at the critical moment his ship would have perished. . . .

The distances in Siberia are enormous, and one becomes accustomed to noticing old sign-posts, dating from before the building of the railway,

which casually announce that Moscow is so-and-so many thousand versts away, and that to get to Vladivostok you should take the first turning to the left and just keep on going for another five or six thousand of those interminable two-thirds of a mile. A splendid training ground for Felix!

It is an interesting moment when, for the first time, you find yourself looking up at a signboard in the forest which announces that it is twenty-seven versts to the next village in winter and thirty-five in summer. You are reminded of the showman whose eloquent spiel about the great Bengal man-eating tiger to be seen in the tent included the declaration that he was positively ten feet six from nose to tail and twelve feet nine from tail to nose. Rails and bridges, you know, shrink a bit in cold weather and expand in hot sunshine. So might roads. But a difference of eight versts in thirty-five! So mighty a bulge would be like a mountain range in summer—or a deep canyon in winter. What a place to live in! Surely the farmers must feel more like fishermen out on the Grand Banks when a young hurricane is running.

The solution of the mystery, however, is quite simple. In summer the trail goes meandering over forest and steppe, with many a twist and turn when a hill is in the way. In winter it is deserted, for every one sledges over the frozen river in the neighbourhood. There is often, even there, a bad patch of rough ice, where a thaw, after an early freeze-up, has enabled the big river to break its bonds for a few days and to jam its drift-ice on to shoals or into bends in its course. The safe and smooth track is indicated by boughs of pine stuck into little heaps of snow and broken ice every few hundred feet.

A considerable proportion of the people of Siberia are further from the seat of their Government at Moscow than they are from the centre of the earth.

In numerous instances the road distances, as marked by old verst posts, are inaccurate, sometimes to your advantage. There was a queer local political deal in the background, for instance, when the track from Kultuk, south of Baikal, to Snenaya was made, about one hundred years ago.

It was to the advantage of someone, long since dead and gone, to represent that distance to be as short as possible. One hundred and four versts was declared to be its length. A subsequent survey showed the correct measurement to be one hundred and forty-two, but no change was made in the mileage charges for hiring post-horses; so one got a cheap ride in *that* part of the country.

I have inveighed elsewhere in this book about the practice of assuming a memorial to be "interesting" merely because it is associated with the memory of some bygone person who happened to achieve a certain degree of contemporary prominence. But, out in Tomsk, I came across an old log shack that does deserve mention. It was the abode of a Tsar who got tired of his job, downed tools, and walked out—as a tramp. This log cottage, in which Alexander I. passed his old age, stood on the slope of a hill in the outskirts of the city. Monks from the monastery near by had built over it a sheet-iron shelter roof, painted green, to protect its weathered timber, and explained to me that it was a holy spot, as, indeed was apparent from the



number of *ikons* on its walls. By now the Bolsheviks have probably burned it down and turned its site into the city garbage dump, in that gentlemanly way of theirs.

Sick of wars and worries, the old ruler of All the Russias arranged with a faithful confidant to have it announced that he had died, at Taganrog, in the south of Russia, and to send to St. Petersburg the body of a local peasant who had just died of rheumatic fever. The latter part of the scheme did not prove feasible, however, and an empty coffin was dispatched.

Staff in hand and with the ragged clothes of a tramp on his back, the Tsar fared forth on the road, a homeless wanderer. Russia has always had an enormous number of these drifting old people. Life is not hard upon them. They can be sure of food and shelter, in return for rendering the varied services of a hanger-on in any of the patriarchal farm households that exist today all the way between Poland and China, as they existed in Britain and western Europe throughout the Middle Ages. They demand neither bed nor wage. The

monasteries, too, shelter hundreds of thousands of them every night.

Eventually, the Tsar came to Tomsk, then but a pioneer settlement on the steppes. He was a very kind, understanding old fellow, selfless and ever ready to comfort the afflicted. He nursed the sick, shared his crusts with the hungry, kept in touch with folks heavily burdened with troubles. He even nursed poor wretches stricken with cholera.

"Theodore Kuzmiltch," as he called himself, died in his hermit's hut, in 1864. There in a corner, when I visited it, was the crude trestle bed on which he breathed his last. By the little window hung a censer, filled with glowing charcoal. Lamps and candelabra swung before the *ikons* presented by pilgrims. Here and there lay wreaths of artificial flowers.

Several portraits of the Tsar were on the walls. They showed him as a young man in his prime, and, again, resplendent in the military uniforms of his middle age. Among them was the portrait of "Theodore Kuzmiltch," painted shortly before his death by one of the monks at the monastery up the

hill. The resemblance between the grizzled old hermit and the famous Tsar is quite striking. They have the same high domed forehead, the same wide brows, tall stature, and broad shoulders.

"Theodore Kuzmiltch's" identity leaked out in a number of ways. A maid in the service of a Jewish leather merchant of the place received a letter from her dying brother in a village in the Crimea. This man had been one of the sentries at the Taganrog *château* where Tsar Alexander was supposed to have died. The maid's family had been astonished that, shortly after the Emperor's death, their sentry relative had suddenly left the army and set himself up on a well-stocked farm. A Russian soldier's pay does not give opportunities for buying a farm out of his savings. They had no idea how he had been able to manage it. In this last letter to his sister at Tomsk he explained that his windfall had been hush-money for holding his tongue about the Tsar's disappearance. A Siberian farmer divulged, after Kuzmiltch's death, that the old man had told him who he really was, and had sworn him to secrecy. And there came to light

one piece of evidence after another as to his identity. Not the least pathetic was the dramatic testimony given by three pilgrims who had moved the grizzled, tattered old man by the recountal of a brutal act of a military governor. For a while the greybeard sat silently, with bowed head, musing. Then he sprang to his feet, his eyes flashing, his head thrown back. Drawing himself up to his full height, he crashed his fist down on the rude wooden table, and cried, "I will remove that man!" It was not the petulant, grieved ejaculation of an old hermit of humble estate. It was the Imperial wrath of the Autocrat of All the Russias, unwittingly revealed in a moment of senile forgetfulness.

And when, last year, the Bolshevik government opened the coffins of several of the tsars and tsaritsas, in the imperial mausoleum in the fortress of Peter and Paul, at Leningrad, they found that that of the "hermit tsar" was empty, with its seals intact.

Other famous men, too, have vanished, leaving the history books to describe them as dead for many years before their span of life had ended.

There are strong grounds for believing, for instance, that Napoleon Bonaparte's right-hand man, the illustrious Marshal Ney, was not executed in Paris, but escaped to the United States and taught in little wayside schools for the best part of twenty-seven years, and that his grave is in a remote village churchyard in the hills of North Carolina. By a very strange coincidence, Ney was the captor of Moscow, and the "hermit tsar" the monarch who then repulsed him and drove him out of Russia. The marshal was a self-made man. Born in Lorraine in 1769, he was intended by his father, a *petit bourgeois* manufacturer of wine casks, for the law, but the boy had other ideas about life. He enlisted in the hussars at eighteen, and rose so rapidly during the Netherlands campaign that, eight years later, he had become a general. He came to grief in Russia, into which he had marched triumphantly with half a million men. The grim generals, Janvier and Février, rallied to burned Moscow's standard—and back he staggered across the frontier, with only a tenth of his troops. His subsequent ups and downs need the

space of a long book for their narration. At last, after the *débâcle* of Waterloo, he retired for a while to Switzerland, but, on returning, was flung into a dungeon, suddenly court-martialled one evening on an absurd charge of treason, and awakened from sleep at midnight, to be told that he would be shot at dawn. And it was officially announced that the sentence had been carried out. What extraordinary adventures the marshal experienced during the next four years has yet to be discovered. Light may be thrown on them by some packet of yellowing letters in the forgotten archives of an old *château* of France, or in secret reports in the war or foreign office of some European capital, over which a century's dust has fallen. In September, 1819, however, a man who appears to have been the marshal turned up at the village inn at Cheraw, in North Carolina, convinced a local grandee, Colonel Benjamin Rogers, that he knew enough to teach small children reading, writing, and arithmetic, and proudly landed the job of village schoolmaster. . . . He fainted in school, from shock, on the day when a boy

brought in a newspaper telling of Napoleon's death on St. Helena, and an hour later burned his private papers and cut his throat. He was revived by Colonel Rogers and a fellow exile, Baron Poelmitz, and he did not die until 1846. The long-resident families of the Asheboro region, the part of the country where he spent those years, have several records, I believe, of his exile. His handwriting was that of Napoleon's brilliant henchman. He had a head of thick, unruly red hair, and the measurements of his exhumed bones were corroborative evidence. Forty-four years ago, a local resident of irreproachable integrity, Mr. Burgess Gaither of Farmington, made the following memorandum, for the information of posterity:

"Marshal Ney taught school on one of my father's plantations, in 1832, at which time I was his pupil. He told me, with great detail, of the supposed execution: 'Louis XVIII. was full of revenge. He ordered that some of my old soldiers, whom I had often led in battle, should be my executioners. The thing was so revolting to Frenchmen that a

plan was formed for my escape. The officer appointed to superintend the execution told one of my friends to apply to the king for my body for burial. He did so and the necessary permission was granted. I was told to give the command to fire, but to fall as I gave it. I did so. The soldiers, who had previously received special instructions, fired almost instantly, the balls passing over my head and striking the wall behind. I was pronounced dead, put into a carriage, and driven off to a neighbouring hospital. The casket they buried was of lead. The grave-digger found it heavy, and never dreamed it was empty. That night I was disguised, and started on my journey to America. . . .’”

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## Chapter 12

### VODKA AND WINDOWS

The Russians, for some centuries, have been notorious for drinking more than has been good for them. Even in the days of Elizabethan England, when good liquor abounded at every table in his native land, Master George Turberville, secretary to an English diplomatic mission to Moscow in 1568, felt impelled to put on rhymed record the inability of the Muscovites to avoid excess.

“Folke,” quoth he, “fit to be of Bacchus’  
train, so quaffing is their kinde.

Drink is their whole desire, the pot is all their  
pride,

The sob’rest head doth once a day stand  
needful of a guide;

If he to banquet bid his friends, he will not  
shrinke,

On them at dinner to bestowe a dozen kinds  
of drinke;

Such liquour as they have, and as the country  
gives,

But chiefly two, one called Kwas, whereby  
the Mousike lives,

Small ware and waterlike, but somewhat  
tarte in taste.

The rest is mead of honey made, wherewith  
their lips they baste.

And if he go unto his neighbour as a gueste,  
He cares for little meat, if so his drinke be  
of the best."

The curse of Russia and Siberia has been the cheap potato spirit called vodka, sold by the bottle only at government dram shops but obtainable by the glass at every restaurant and at even the humblest eating-house. It was recognized about forty years ago that a light beer ought to be substituted, if the nation was to have any hope of emerging from mediævalism and ranking as an equal with modern agricultural and industrial powers, which have to maintain a standard of as unimpaired efficiency as possible. But the last thing in the world that the nation wanted was to become "western-

ized." The multitude of princelings had no desire at all to see the wane of feudalism. The merchants had no hankering for competition and were all for as easy a time as possible. The peasants were, on the whole, quite contented. Their special grievances were far more often put right, when they sent a delegation to their feudal lord, than disregarded. They had the priceless possession of liberty. They worked, when and as they chose, to help not only themselves, but this neighbour and that, and the community. They instinctively shied, like a scared horse, at the groping tentacles of the menace of The Thing Coming Out of the West, which would time their comings and their goings, and coop them up in factories and offices; that would turn them, destitute, into the street if they lifted up their voices and sang over their work a verse of a lilting old refrain in tune with their mood; that would brutally refuse to let them shelter a few moments from the rain and would snatch away their bread if they chose to leave their task for half an hour, to sprawl on the fragrant turf in the hot spring sunshine and chat or dream. They felt that

they had the substance of liberty, and they were in no mood to barter it for discs of metal in a pay envelope and servitude to a soulless machine.

So, the nation being practically unanimous that the Russian scheme of things was pretty good, thank you, kept its vodka and its liberty and did not at all share the indignation of America and Western Europe when political busybodies were sent to cool off in Siberia.

One vain political crank can and does make far more noise than the hundred and a half millions that he does not even claim to have chosen him as a spokesman, and the Siberian political exiles were never regarded by a single one of the large number of peasants I talked to about them before the Revolution as heroes or martyrs. They were regarded just as the average man in the street in America or England regards the perfervid "bolshie" soapbox orator—as a windbag seeking to usurp authority to which he has no just claim, for the purpose of making us all behave as he would wish us to, for the satisfaction of his curiosity as to what would happen if civilization were

suddenly kicked over like an ant-hill. No greater error can be made even today than to believe that the voices from Russia that get into print represent the nation. The nature of the Russian is what it has always been. His naïveté and patience, his readiness to receive the so loudly promised something for nothing, and the spectacular brutality with which his doubting comrades have been treated, have produced temporary changes on the surface of the scheme of things. But what he wants is to be let alone, to lead the existence, out on the land, of an easy-going, unambitious small farmer, with cheap "rum" and no interference. That is the life, today, that nineteen out of every twenty millions in Russia and Siberia are leading—but they don't keep cabling the fact to New York and London.

Vodka shops were suddenly shut down when the nation had orders to mobilize for what was to become the World War, in July, 1914. But, almost immediately, illicit distilling began, and within a few months it had reached enormous proportions. Hardly any news of the Russian Prohibition

situation reached the outside world during the next three or four years; both the mail and the cable censorship suppressed every allusion to it that fell into their hands. But matters went the same way as in America, except for there being hardly any official steps taken to stop the private production and sale of alcohol. In numerous cases monasteries suddenly attracted many more pilgrims than hitherto, owing to the monk's reputation for sound secular knowledge of the workings of yeast and other simple constituents of home-brew. Eventually the whole position became such a farce, and deprived the Government of such an enormous amount of revenue, that the law was repealed.

The vodka distilleries in Siberia are big, well-proportioned buildings that are frequently mistaken by strangers for the leading bank or the city hall. The most impressive edifice in Yakutsk, for instance, is the large pink stucco home of "rum," but I found both the chief bank and the Governor-General of the huge northeastern corner of Asia housed in log shacks. You can always tell,

walking through a town or village, which is the vodka shop, without even looking up for the yellow and green sign, as there is a red splash on a post of the porch. Only "sassietty guys," among the peasants, know what a corkscrew is used for. The usual procedure on emerging with a bottle is to tap it against the post, to chip off the red sealing-wax that coats the cork, and then to lever out the latter with one's pocketknife, and take a sip.

Vodka is not a pleasant drink, especially in its cheaper qualities, which smell strongly of methylated spirits. It is not so strong as whisky, but it speedily intoxicates. Siberia is the only country where one becomes accustomed to seeing unconscious peasants lie in the streets of towns, and roads of villages, like so many corpses. Passers-by just let them lie, and drivers swerve to avoid them, when they are full in the fairway. On sunny Sunday mornings I used sometimes to roam Irkutsk with a Danish friend, making character studies of the fallen with a camera. On one occasion when, crouching and peering into the view-finder, only

about five feet away I was horrified to see, in the tiny square of glass, my subject open his eyes and stare straight at me. I do not know who was the more startled—he looked as though he thought he was being shot by the little gunmetal contraption that this crouching stranger was levelling at him at point-blank range. I was struck by the imminent prospect of this large, hairy, ham-fisted person with bloodshot eyes, and, extremely probably, leathern lungs and a bloodshot vocabulary, scrambling up and pursuing me all the way across town. We each held the pose for a few seconds. Then, to my great relief, those eyes closed. Without waiting to close the camera, I turned and gumshoed rapidly off through the deepest and quietest patches of dust to the nearest corner. No avenging footfalls sounded behind me. He had probably taken me for a mirage.

A certain amount of bottled beer is seen in the towns, but it is not popular among the middle classes and is hardly ever touched by the peasants, who find it very expensive in comparison with vodka. The wines from the Caucasian vineyards



are, on the whole, excellent, and are generally to be found on the tables of the Siberian middle and upper classes. But sweet French champagne, doctored with brandy, is preferred to them on the festive occasions for which an excuse is so frequently found. There was a jovial old merchant in Irkutsk who, being forbidden by his wife to open a bottle of champagne except on special occasions, went to some trouble to ascertain, by prowls in the cemetery, the dates of demise of as many relatives as possible, so that, with an appropriately long face, he could emerge from the cellar with a bottle and remark: "Twenty-six years ago today, my dear, that poor Uncle Nikolai was taken from us. A fine fellow Uncle Nikolai! We will toast his memory this evening." He showed no unfair discrimination, either. He saw that *her* relatives, too, were remembered.

The equivalent of Europe's beer among the Siberians is the drink called *kvas*, made from fermented black bread. It is mild and musty, a mean sort of beverage. The various native races drink a great deal of *koumiss*, which is a spirit made from

mares' milk and sheep's milk. There is even a variety made from reindeer's milk, by the Tchuktches and Kamchatdals. The making of *koumiss* is a messy business, beginning with the parking of the mares' milk in raw ox-hide bags, until a sour, reeking scum, thickly speckled with dead flies, has formed on the top. Into this the family plunge hands that have never known soap or been formally washed, to scoop it up and stuff it into their mouths, as only the "skimmed" milk below is used for the distillation. In the native hut the *koumiss* is passed round in a filthy wooden bowl, each person drinking direct from it. I used, with tappings and a pained expression, to plead stomach trouble and beg to be excused when a Buriat or Yakut took me home and told his wife to prepare a celebration in my honour.

There used to be plenty of liquid refreshment available, apparently, in that mysterious old capital of the Mongol hordes, Karakorum, up in the unmapped mountains to the south of the Trans-Baikal. When Oktai Khan was running the town, seven centuries ago, the famous Occidental gar-

dener, Guillaume, of Paris, is stated to have been employed to lay out beautiful pleasure gardens where fountains spouted wine, mead, *koumiss*, and other contents of the best mediæval bars, into silver basins.

"Nevertheless," added a French historian, "Karakorum was never a great city." I like the "nevertheless." . . .

Just before the outbreak of the World War I was walking along a side-street of Irkutsk one evening when I noticed a garish blaze of light at an open doorway through which came the strains of sackbut and psaltery. People were trickling up to a paybox.

"What's going on there?" I asked a youth, who was taking out his purse. "Skettin." "Skettin?" That was a new one on me. I did not know the word. An appalling number of Russian words and phrases begin with that hiss, consisting of *s* apostrophe. He added something about an "Angliski mees." It sounded intriguing. I paid twenty kopecks and went in. From down the passage came a rumbling noise, interspersed with thumps and

hoarse cries. I parted a curtain and stepped into—a roller-skating rink. A very handsome English girl was teaching the populace how to keep afloat. Her skirt hardly came to her knees, and in those days skirts were worn down to the feet. She skated superbly, but one hardly noticed her prowess in the general *mêlée*. Grace and poise are not the long suit of the Siberian, male or female, at any time, but learning to roller-skate——!!! Fifteen or twenty feet was an exceptionally long cruise. Then, as though suddenly electrocuted or stricken by a mysterious death-ray, the skater's arms and legs did extraordinary things that legs and arms were never meant to do—and down he went with a wild cry and a crash. Sunk in the fairway, he upset all local navigation. In a few seconds several others had piled up on him, intentionally, I believe. They knew what was coming to them very shortly, and any place softer than the floor looked mighty good. Round this sprawling heap of wreckage glided the instructress, now on this leg, now on that, in graceful arabesques, unruffled, unperturbed, with a faint, inscrutable smile. . . . A

queer way of earning a living, right out in the middle of Tartaric Asia, more than a thousand miles from any other English or American person. . . .

Crawley the Albino used to keep a small *traktir* (saloon) in Tomsk and turned it into what I believe was the first pool-room in Siberia. What a strange fellow! His father had been brought to London, as a youth, by an English traveller. The boy married an Englishwoman in London and took her name. The couple had three albino sons and two normal daughters. The family exhibited itself, as a show, all over Europe, even in Turkey and Greece. Crawley went so well in St. Petersburg and Moscow that he reckoned he would extend his tour to China, a journey of several thousand miles by cart and sledge, making his expenses en route. But the peasant communities would not pay to look at him, and the long journey proved a bore. So he stopped at Tomsk and settled down there. He had long hair, like a woman, and wore it in a plait; and his eyes were rose-coloured.

A queer fish from England was the engineer,

Mr. Major, who came out, as a young man, to train the Russians for a while in a factory, and stayed all his life. The slovenly ways of the Russians were a sore trial to his orderly soul; when he found a dirty piece of machinery he used first to tell the mechanic in charge of it just what he thought—and that was enough to blister the paint—and then, taking off one of his woollen stockings, he himself cleaned and polished the metal with it. During the winter he wore three pairs when he went on duty, but he went home with one stocking on one leg and two or three on another. Some evenings found him with one leg bare, covered only by his boot. Each mechanic whose machinery had needed this summary treatment had personally to bring back the boss's stocking to the house every evening. If he forgot it he was flogged with a birch rod next day. Tsar Alexander I. himself once visited the works, and was so amused at this drastic way of maintaining efficiency that he gave Major a twenty-acre concession which yielded a considerable quantity of gold.

Another man who gained a far wider reputation

in Siberia than he could have imagined was a certain American professor who made a point of going to the local fish-market in the towns he visited, and buying only any wild and woolly looking specimens that he noticed there, as he was collecting for a museum at home. When he got back to his hotel he packed them in cans of embalming fluid, solemnly informing the servants, who were very interested in these goings-on, that he was a member of an American tribe of raw fish eaters, allied to the Siberians' own Giliaks, of the lower Amur. That fellow has been gossiped about among the peasants of every town in northern Asia, where amid such extensive illiteracy, the sayings and doings of queer characters receive much greater publicity than in lands where people go to the newspapers to slake their thirst for thrills and curiosities.

In a country with a long winter of intense cold much care has to be taken with windows. Siberian windows are double, sometimes with a second little window inset, to render it possible to obtain ventilation; but usually, even this is sealed

up by strips of gummed paper. The result is that rooms get appallingly stuffy, and the better-class hotels and homes "remedy" this by liberal sprayings with perfume. When several score cigarettes have been smoked, and half a pint or so of patchouli has been turned loose to do its worst on what remains of the air in even the biggest room—and rooms are very spacious—you can guess at the result. A pleasing feature of Siberian windows, however, is that usually they have a wide shelf, inside the room, on which flowering and evergreen plants are grown. This gives a very cozy and cheery aspect both indoors and out. As you go north, and, in June and July, bedtime brings no darkness, you find it very difficult to emulate the people's indifference to sunny nights. I myself used to cover my windows with black satin at ten o'clock every evening, light a candle, and go to bed like a Christian. But that did not always ensure a good night's rest.

I was once awakened by a tap on the wall and a call that a merchant wished to see me. It seemed early for business, but I shuffled into my slippers



and let him in, blinking at the glare of light that came through the open door. The "merchant" proved to be a fellow with a few boxes of oranges which he was selling at twenty cents each. Now an orange in the forests of northern Siberia is some considerable exotic. Tens of thousands of dwellers up there have not even seen one. Twenty cents, too, was a price that immediately raised the status of a food pedlar to that of a big butter-and-egg man. Where eggs cost a quarter of a cent and a salmon as long as your arm a nickel, a twenty-cent piece of fruit no bigger than your fist compels respect. I treated the "merchant" as a fellow magnate of the Produce Exchange and paid the price of twenty salmon for five of his oranges. He accepted a cigarette, lit up, then gave a devastating yawn that went on growing until I feared he might split under the ears, and remarked that he reckoned that he would now go back to the shack where he was lodging, and go to bed.

"Why, have you been selling oranges all night?" I replied with interest.

"All *night*, *Barin*?" he exclaimed. "It is only

ten minutes to eleven now!" I looked at my watch. I looked at the sunshine outside. I looked at the biscuit tin on the shelf, at the box containing half a ham, at the packet of tea, the kettle, and the little methylated stove. He was right—but I got myself the breakfast I felt I had coming to me, in the circumstances, before getting to work on that night's rest again.

I had a chat with the "merchant" the next (real) morning. He took his oranges in northern Siberia as seriously as Borrow took his Bibles in Spain, but all the interesting natives he encountered were merely "dirty heathens" to him. It annoyed him that they wanted such a lot of explanation about a simple thing like an orange. They wanted to know if you cooked it, and if not, why not, and when he explained testily that it simply was *not* done by the best, or any other, people, they enquired with that exasperating blandness of the logical aborigine, how he could tell that an orange would not appear at its best when flung into a pot with a lump of raw mutton if he had not tried it that way?

In one village on the Yenisei the Tungus headman had been especially pleased with the flavour of the pips, although assured that they were not to be eaten.

"Are they poisonous?" he asked.

"No," said the merchant.

"Does 'The Little Father' (the Tsar) then forbid us to eat the pips?"

"No, it is *lawful* to eat the pips."

"Well, I shall eat the pips. I like 'em!" said the headman, emphatically.

"What, I ask you, can one do with people like that?" the merchant exclaimed to me.

"Sell them more oranges?" I suggested. . . . But there was worse to come, and that he confided to me when we had swapped cigarettes and raised our glasses in another reciprocal toast.

"When I was travelling up the Aldan last year I fell in with a boatload of Yakuts who had just delivered a cargo of mammoth tusks to Gromov and got a good price for it. They bought *desyatoks* (tens) of my oranges as they lay alongside the little steamboat, when she moored to the bank that

night. *And what do you suppose they did with them?"*

Images flashed through my mind of glorious spectacles—the bombing of the ship with the squashier of the loot, the hectic pursuit of the captain and the portlier of the passengers across the squelching *tundra* by orange-armed natives.

I shook my head, gleefully expectant.

"They made a laughing-stock of me before all the passengers by eating the peel and throwing the pulp into the river!" His face was contorted with indignation.

"Did they laugh and jeer at you?" I said sympathetically. "Surely the captain should have chased them away. He was a Russian, wasn't he?"

But, it appeared, the new-rich ivory hunters had not laughed, nor had they jeered. They had just cautiously investigated this orange proposition, in a spirit of judicial impartiality. They ate some of the peel, and they ate some of the pulp. ("And the pips?" I interpolated. He made an impatient gesture. What happened to the pips in *this* case he had forgotten. Their fate had been o'ershadowed

by the greater outrage.) They disliked the pulp, so, *ph!*—he demonstrated what they did with it. They liked the acrid flavour of the peel. So they ate the bits of peel, with relish.

That, he repeated wrathfully, *that* was the sort of people *they* were.

But to return to the windows. . . .

In the summer the natives of the North sometimes have glass windows in wooden frames for their huts, but generally the window openings are bare, or closed with portable screens of twigs and weeds. In winter, however, they fill the openings with a thick slab of ice. An ice window does not sound very attractive, but it serves its purpose admirably, for it keeps the intense cold out as effectively as a double glass one.

In the old days slabs of mica were used as windows. This curious "natural glass" occurs in the soil in many parts of the country. A man tried to sell me a disused mine of it situated near Kirensk, when I was travelling down the Lena. I found several sixteenth century houses and an old monastery at Kirensk with mica windows, and a few in

the Trans-Baikal. The pieces of mica split like slate. They were trimmed into various shapes and sewn together like a patchwork quilt, with thread made of plaited horsehair. The native races have long worked easily accessible deposits for decorating their household ware. They sew little glittery bits on to birch bark. A cylindrical box thus adorned, which I obtained in the province of Yakutsk, is among the exhibits in the Ethnology room at the British Museum. Strahlenburg found that in Russia the brownish or the inferior cuts of mica, seen through which images looked blurred, were used for the windows downstairs, to baffle "snoopers," and real glass for the upper storey. Mica was used also for ships' lanterns, in his day, as the firing of cannon did not break it.

The use of mica for ornamentation was prevalent in ancient Egypt. A lot of queer little silhouettes of animals and birds, cut out of this glittering "natural glass," in some cases scratched and punctured with holes as decorative elaboration of the motif, very much as are made by the northern Siberian natives today, were found, three or four

years ago, in the tombs of the Egyptian Governor of Kerma and his family, by the Harvard University-Boston Art Museum expedition. The Governor lived about forty-five hundred years ago. Dr. Reisner thinks that these ornaments were badges sewn on the caps of soldiers and retainers.

I believe that Kirensk, which is built at the junction of the rivers Lena and Kirenga, is the "Kiringa" figuring in an interesting anecdote of Kubalski's: The Lithuanian general, Josef Kopec, who was in banishment in Siberia from 1795 to 1799, was shut up for the night at Kiringa, as he was being convoyed into the north from Irkutsk, in a mica-windowed room. He found, scratched on a pane, by his friend, the tragic Princess Menzi-kov, a set of verses in her own handwriting. The Princess had accompanied her husband into exile and died, "of despair," some years previously.

A good many high-born enemies of the emperors of Russia were exiled in the old days, both before and after the reign of Peter the Great. It was Peter who was the first tsar to see in the back o' the beyond of his empire anything but a field for loot

and a convenient wilderness in which to lose persons one did not like without having their blood on one's conscience. His extensive travels had given him a keen interest in matters geographical, and he absorbed a high degree of culture from the savants of Western Europe. In 1717, he visited the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris, and in the following year he became a member. He was the only monarch who ever kept up a regular correspondence with this body. He sent it a meticulously prepared chart of the Caspian sea, from observations and soundings he had ordered to be taken. He equipped and dispatched several cultured men to various parts of the empire; one he sent on a tour round Russia, another to Kazan, another to Astrakhan, collecting reliable information, geographical, economic, ethnological, and commercial.

Daniel Amadeus Messerschmidt, a Dantziger physician, Tsar Peter sent out to Siberia in 1719, to keep his eyes open to men and matters in general but more particularly to enquire into the natural history and resources of the North of Asia—no small task. It is scarcely to be wondered at that



the painstaking Herr Messerschmidt remained eight years out in the unmapped East. However, he came back in 1727 with a perfect mine of information, and had even found time to conduct extensive astronomical and antiquarian researches in the wilderness.

While Messerschmidt was away, Peter sent off a couple of ships from Archangel, to bear eastward on the same cruise along the Arctic coast of Siberia accomplished forty-five years ago by Norden-skjöld in the *Vega*, to ascertain whether Siberia joined North America. One of them sailed proudly out of Archangel one morning, amid the plaudits of the townspeople and the ringing of the church bells—and was never seen or heard of again. Her sister ship experienced the fate of every previous vessel on that cruise, and only too many since. She was crushed in the grinding floes of the Kara sea.

Undismayed by the failure of this undertaking, Peter began to organize another similar expedition. Its command he entrusted to two Danish sea captains, Bering and Sprangberg, and a Russian named

Tchirikov. They were to travel overland, a matter of six thousand miles, to Kamchatka, and taking ship there, to follow the coast northward. But the Tsar died before the plans for the project matured. The Tsaritsa Katharine the First, however, carried on with the scheme. The winter of the year of his death she sent out a small party, provided with a paper of instructions that Peter himself had written. They returned in 1730, after having had to turn back in mid-Siberia. In the meanwhile Katharine had died, and the Tsaritsa Anne was on the throne.

Anne was no less loyal than Katharine to the memory of "the scientific Tsar." She had another expedition equipped, with Bering to command the ship. This expedition was divided into two sections. The first, led by Bering, was to press on as quickly as it could to the Pacific, and, taking ship at Kamchatka, to sail north. The second section, under instructions from the Imperial Academy of St. Petersburg, was to proceed by easy stages to Kamchatka, mapping the country, making astronomical observations, and studying the tribes,

fauna, and flora. Professors Ivan George Gmelin and Müller of the Academy were two of the members of the land party, which took a northern route to Yakutsk, where Krascheninikov, Steller; Berkhman, the painter; and Gorlanov, a student, left them to go on to Kamchatka, in which region, as well as in the province of Okhotsk, they collected much information.

When Katharine II. came to the throne in 1760 she maintained the Imperial interest in Siberian exploration, instructing the Academy to choose a number of able and learned men who might be entrusted with this work. That Russia had, in those days, a good deal better fate in mind for Siberia than that of a region of exile is indicated by the sailing orders given to these nominees. They were "to make active examination into the nature of the soil and that of the waters; means of putting the desert places into cultivation; the state of current agriculture; the most common diseases, both of man and cattle, and the curative methods employed; the breeding of cattle, the keeping of bees, and the rearing of silkworms; fisheries and the

chase; minerals and mineral waters; arts, trades, and objects of industry; and plants and trees." They were "to rectify the position of places, to make geographical and meteorological observations; to report all that relates to manners, customs, languages, traditions, and antiquities; and to mark down exactly whatever they should find remarkable concerning all these points." . . .

Thus planned the Tsars and Tsaritsas. They were fortunate in the pioneers who did the work for them.

Gmelin was a doctor of Tübingen. He began his extensive travels in August, 1733, when, with M. Müller, a professor of history; M. Delillade la Croyère, a professor of astronomy; six associates, an interpreter, a scientific instrument mechanic, a painter, and a designer, he left St. Petersburg for Siberia. By way of Ekaterineburg, Irbit, Tobolsk, Semipalatinsk, Ust Kamenogorsk, Kolivan, Kusnetsk, Tomsk, Yeniseisk, Krasnoyarsk, Kansk, Nijni Udinsk, and Balagansk, he arrived in the Trans-Baikal. He visited the Mongolian frontier at Kiakhta; and Nertchinsk, on the Shilka (Upper

Amur), the last little outpost of empire. Then he made his way up north, by way of Ilimsk and the Lena, to Yakutsk, where, failing to find further orders from St. Petersburg—an accident had happened to the courier—he returned with Professor Müller, up the Lena and across Siberia, back to Russia.

On June 23, 1768, accompanied by four students, Krasheninikov, who was with him in the expedition of 1733-37, Ivan Mikhailov, Sergei Meslov, and an apothecary, a draughtsman, a hunter and taxidermist, and a military escort, Professor Gmelin made an expedition along the southeastern frontier of Russia. From St. Petersburg he went to Voronezh, and down to the Sea of Azov, the steppes of Astrakhan, the Caucasus, Trans-Caucasia, and along the north of Persia. In Persia he had trouble with the lawless and domineering Khans, but he decided to go back again. So doing, he was seized by Usmei Khan, ninety versts from Derbent, and died a prisoner in this brigand's hands. The Academy accounted itself very lucky at being able to get possession of the Professor's

journal of that ill-fated journey, the manuscript of which—indecipherable by the illiterate brigand—was with him when he died. The Tsaritsa Katharine was so grieved at his loss (she had paid him sixteen hundred roubles a year from her own purse during his explorations) that she granted a year's pay to his widow. . . .

Then there was Dr. Peter Simon Pallas, the naturalist. Leaving St. Petersburg in June, 1768, he visited several of the central Russian towns, Novgorod, Vladimir, Kazimov, Murom and Arsamas, and the region between the Sura and the Volga. At Simbirsk he wintered, examining the surrounding country. In the spring of 1769 he went through Samara, Syzran, and Orenburg, forded the Yaik and arrived at Gurievgorodok, where he met his colleagues, Professors Lepekhin and Lovitz, the latter of whom had just established an observatory there.

A brief digression upon Professor Lovitz: Captured at Dobrinka, five years later, by the rebels, who had caused so much confusion in the recent war against the Turks, he was dragged to the

borders of the Slovla, and in August, 1774, was hanged after being impaled alive on a sharpened stake. The astronomer's assistant and his son escaped with his journals and some of his instruments.

After examining the neighbouring coasts and islands of the Caspian, Dr. Pallas went north to Ufa, in the northern foothills of the Urals. Having wintered here, he left for the Urals and then penetrated into Siberia by way of Tcheliabinsk. Using this little frontier town as a base, he passed the greater part of the winter, assisted by Professors Falk and Lepekhin and Captain Rutschkov, in exploring the Government of Orenburg, which contains the southern Urals. Shortly after Professor Falk's arrival in March, Dr. Pallas was joined by his assistant, Georgi, who was destined to take his place among the great pioneers of early Siberian exploration.

In April the little band broke into units who went on their way. Captain Rutschkov, Dr. Pallas' close companion all winter, left him and set out upon another journey. Dr. Pallas went up the

Irtish, visited the Kolyvan mines and the Schlangenburg mountains, and reached Barnaoul. Here he found Professor Falk, who had come by way of Omsk and the Barabin steppe, lying ill. From Barnaoul, Dr. Pallas went north to Tomsk and, on October 10, 1771, arrived at Krasnoyarsk, where he made his winter quarters. In January, 1772, the student Suyev caught up with him after having made, the previous summer, a journey down the Ob toward the Arctic. Suyev turned over his data to him. Next month Georgi turned up at Krasnoyarsk, after having seen Falk off, and then came the students Bykov, Kaschkarev, and Lebediev, who had been under Falk's wing. Pallas left on March 7, for Irkutsk and Lake Baikal, with two students. He gathered a large quantity of new data around Baikal, at Selenginsk and in the Saiyansk mountains, then returning to his Krasnoyarsk base for the winter. In January the party started home, journeying by way of Tomsk, the Irtish, Kazan, Sarapul, Yaitskigorodok, and Astrakhan. They reached St. Petersburg on June 30, 1774.

Ivan Amadeus Georgi, a member of the Natural



History Society of Berlin, was sent out to relieve Professor Falk when news came through that he was seriously ill. He left St. Petersburg on June 1, 1770, travelling by way of Moscow and Astrakhan, and found Falk in a little Armenian settlement out on the Kalmuk steppe. He accompanied the sick explorer to Uralsk and on to Orenburg, where they remained until the beginning of 1771. Falk pluckily struggled on, though in bad shape. He often had to lie up weeks at a time. Together they investigated the Urals. By the end of June, Falk was better, and left for Omsk, arranging for Georgi to follow by way of Ischim, in the nomad Kirghiz territory. Together then they went from Omsk to the Ob and Barnaoul, where Falk fell ill again, and thence on to Salaiyeer and the Altai. When they returned to Tomsk, Falk at last threw up the sponge and went back to Russia.

Georgi received orders to work under Pallas. He charted Baikal, among other tasks, and returned, by way of south Russia, to St. Petersburg, where he arrived in September, 1774, after more than four years' investigation of Siberia. On his way

back Georgi visited his former team-mate at Kazan. Poor Falk was in bad shape and kept averring that his travelling days were over. Georgi stayed late, talking over old times and cheering him up. He left at midnight. The sick explorer's soldier servant saw Professor Falk sitting up in bed, reading, until four o'clock in the morning. Then the servant dropped asleep. He was awakened by the sound of a gun. Falk had cut his throat and shot himself.

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## Chapter 13

### UP IN THE ARCTIC

There are several north Siberias—those of the explorer, the political exile, the naturalist, the trader, the “Indian,” the prospector, the colonist, the official, the investor, the wandering foreigner, and the prophet.

For the explorer, north Siberia contains two big blank spaces on the map, the interior of the Taimyr peninsula and the territory north of the sea of Okhotsk. Topographically, the Taimyr country is likely to be dull, a flat waste of *tundra* (marsh and swampy prairie) broken only by lakes and rivers. The Okhotsk hinterland contains numerous unnamed, unclimbed mountains and volcanoes and streams; it may contain some quite big lakes. As a field for exploration it has the great advantage of having a base that is easily accessible from the sea for most of the year, in the shape of the village named Okhotsk, where men could be

hired. There is even now, I believe, a telegraph wire there, connecting with the rest of the world by way of Yakutsk and Irkutsk. Nordenskjöld, in the *Vega*, cruised clear along the Arctic coast from Norway, and round the corner down into the Pacific. But no explorer, or group of explorers, has yet ventured to travel the whole distance between the Arctic end of the Urals and Bering strait, a fine clean sweep of a journey which some one is going to tackle one of these days. Such a trek would cut athwart the tracks of several previous travellers, but it would take through many hundred miles of new country the man who undertook it. Not a picnic, though—horribly too many mosquitoes in the brief summer and horribly too many blizzards in the long, dark winter. One could not tow along a lot of gear. One would have to live like a native, as Stefansson has done up north of Canada.

A wonderful "lone hand" journey was made up in northeastern Siberia a hundred years ago by Captain John Dundas Cochrane, of the British navy, who set off from Dieppe with a knapsack

on his back and very little money, to stroll over to the Bering strait and take tea with the natives. Returning south, he cut clear through the unexplored region between the Kolyma and Okhotsk, and though he did not range about and, as he regretfully admits, had no knowledge of natural history nor any surveying gear, his account of conditions up there will be found useful by the explorer who decides to investigate this interesting field. In the Kolyma country, Captain Cochrane encountered a witch-doctor who gave an exhibition of the *hara-kiri* trick, which has to be performed with considerable adroitness if it is only to *simulate* a messy disembowelment. The wizard "wore a sort of short surtout, covered over with a variety of small pieces of iron, about the size and shape of a penknife; his boots were embroidered as were also his cap and gloves. The performance of course began by smoking a pipe; then, taking his tambourine and *bolouyak*, or tambourine-stick, he seated himself cross-legged near the person to be exorcised, and began to sing a doleful ditty, accompanied by more doleful music; the import of



*Top:* THE TEA MART AT KIAKHTA; *center:* DRYING MEAT ON THE ROOF FOR THE WINTER; *bottom:* BURIAT METAL-WORKERS.



*Upper left: A YOUNG YAKUT WOMAN; upper right: A WANDERING, LANDLESS OLD RUSSIAN, OF THE TYPE OF THE HERMIT TSAR; bottom: A BETROTHED KIRGHIZ TARTAR GIRL IN HER BEST CLOTHES.*

the song I could not gather. After this introduction he began to jump, hop, and fling about, roaring, screaming, and making the most hideous distortions of face and body, so that I actually believed him to be mad. I never felt more pain for any one than I felt for this Shaman, certainly much more than for the sick person on whose behalf his incantations were made. After this violent exercise he drew his knife and, to all appearance, plunged it into his belly. I felt really alarmed, believing that he had actually committed suicide: he, however, actually drew back the knife in my presence without any effusion of blood, and, indeed, without any actual incision being made. He then formally announced that the evil spirit would not triumph, provided the customary sacrifice were made of a fat mare. The party were then dismissed, with an invitation to come to the next day's feast, when the mare was to be cooked. In all this conjuration there was no sleight of hand, but rather a sleight of the belly, and the case is that the Shamans are, from habit, accustomed to draw in that part of the belly which the knife is supposed



to penetrate to a distance of five or six inches; they never, however, use other than their own knives, from fear, I presume, of their being too long." This self-stabbing hoax was performed by a Koriak witch-doctor, in the presence of Jochelsen. "The spirits say that I should cut myself with a knife!" exclaimed the wizard, in the midst of a *séance*. He borrowed the traveller's sharp, dagger-like knife: "The light in the tent was put out; but the dim light of the Arctic spring night (it was in April) which penetrated the canvas of the tent, was sufficient to allow me to follow the movements of the Shaman," wrote Jochelsen. "He took the knife, beat the drum, and, emitting a rattling sound from his throat, he thrust the knife into his breast, up to the hilt. I noticed, however, that after having cut his jacket, he turned the knife downwards. He drew out the knife with the same rattling in his throat, and resumed beating the drum."

As a place of exile for political suspects during the days of tsarism, northern Siberia was not nearly so bad as it has been painted. It is cold, its villages are remote, and the winters are long and sombre.

But just the same applies to central and northern Russia. All exiles except those caught actually planning, attempting, or having achieved an assassination of some high official with whose political views they happened to differ, were given a considerable degree of freedom after a much shorter term of actual imprisonment than falls to the lot of any modern Italian who is overheard by an eavesdropper while politely and intelligently criticizing Mussolini's notions; or any Spaniard, Portuguese, Hungarian, Albanian, Jugo-Slav, Greek, Bulgar, Bessarabian, Pole, Rumanian, Esthonian, Lithuanian, Lett, or South and Central American who, too, talks politics other than those of the national boss and army-controller of the moment. They merely were told to live for a few years in certain tracts of country no worse, climatically, than Maine, Ohio, or the northern grain belt of the United States, and infinitely preferable, in their scenic and ethnological interest, to the abominations of desolation of Wisconsin, Dakota, and Iowa. They drew government pay; they could marry or have their families join them from home.

There were plenty of fish to catch and furs to wear, and there was plenty of fuel to burn and timber to build with. There was social life, and there were as many books, magazines, and newspapers circulating as any one could read. There were *balalaikas* to play; there was tobacco to smoke, and there was hard liquor in abundance. There is no bigger humbug in history than the tales of woe told in America as *typical* of Siberian political exile. Hard cases there were, of course, and the southern Siberian *penal* settlements at Nertchinsk and two or three other places were frequently the scene of revolting cruelties. But only the "politicals" who played with bombs were exposed to risks of that sort.

In the spring of 1918, the political exiles just home from Siberia, as a result of the revolution, had the time of their lives, and aroused the envy of a considerable number of folk who had never killed or terrorized anything bigger than a mouse. The genuine home-bound exiles had only to declare what they were in order to travel any distance by train without paying their fare. Free food, free

clothing, and gifts of money were lavished on them. In consequence, tens of thousands of self-styled Siberian exiles arose in the land and gave lurid accounts of the tough way they had treated constituted authority, to further the interests of democracy.

Then the newspapers began to take the matter up—and a heavy slump in martyrs ensued. In Minsk was arrested a woman named Katharine Smirnov, who announced that she had murdered Governor Ivanov of Odessa, and described, with harrowing pathos, her sufferings in the Arctic wastes of Yakutsk. Big cash collections were taken up for her, and she was the guest of honour at receptions, where bouquets were presented to her. Then the authorities made enquiries and found that Odessa had never had a governor named Ivanov, and that the lady had posed in that city as a hospital nurse collecting for the wounded and had been expelled by the military police after she had swindled about seventy citizens. In Odessa a young man assaulted the invalid ex-Governor Pilliu, clutching the poor old man as he was walking

310 TIGERS, GOLD, AND WITCH-DOCTORS  
down the street and shouting abuse at him for having allegedly exiled him to Siberia. Then he took up a collection from the sympathetic crowd and slipped away, after the police had taken his name and address. The records were looked up and it was discovered that the man was an impostor.

The Indians find Arctic Siberia a pretty tolerable sort of place to live in. Some fish, some raise reindeer or breed sledge dogs; the staple occupation, however, is fur-trapping and hunting. A good many Samoyedes, Tunguses, and Yakuts devote themselves mainly to collecting the tusks of mammoths, big hairy elephants that died anywhere between 400,000 and 15,000 years ago. More than half the tusks come from the New Siberian isles, northeast of the Lena delta, where the pack ice of spring, driven in by gales, undermines the cliffs and causes falls of the frozen mud of tens of thousands of years ago. But it is one thing to find the tusks and quite another to get them to the Russian traders down south on the mainland. A big pair may weigh nearly a quarter of a ton; specimens brought to me, when I was up in northeastern Si-

beria, ran as long as eleven and twelve feet, and the butt end of the bull tusks ran thicker than a man's thigh. The natives have only fragile skin canoes for the most part, as cumbersome wooden boats have to be abandoned when caught in the great patches of drift ice that are liable suddenly to trap a craft in those seas. The Russians have had some nasty experiences when themselves fetching over the tusks and now generally "let George do it." Poor George, the native, finds himself on Kotelnoi, eyeing disconsolately about the least pleasant piece of cargo in the world for a skin canoe that has to sail thirty or forty miles to the mainland—except, perhaps, a brace of wildcats! The traders strongly discourage the cutting of the tusks into conveniently handleable lengths because it spoils the exposed surfaces. He has to take the thing as it is—a nine-foot new-moon-shaped crescent of ivory that makes navigation a nightmare, and renders a spill a certainty if a streak of dirty weather blows up.

Quite an appreciable proportion of the ivory that leaves the islands has to be jettisoned. Even in winter, when the sea is frozen, it is cruelly hard

work getting the stuff over by sledge, for the ice is very rough and sometimes a party of Indians have to wander about for a week or two before they can find a way out of a maze of great broken chunks of ice forced up into jumbled ridges as high as houses. All things considered, the collection of mammoth ivory entails more hardship than any other acquisitiveness of mankind. Small wonder that the great majority of the natives prefer to stick to fur-trapping!

The Indians themselves, I found, use mammoth ivory for making numbers of things. In the smoke and general squalor of the *yurtas* and huts in which they live, however, it becomes so dark as to be scarcely recognizable. The women comb their hair with ivory combs, and tobacco is smoked in ivory pipes, the bowl of which is lined with a thin piece of beaten iron. A good many carvings are made, too, but not so many as formerly. A talented young Yakut carver, to whom I was directed, I found now established in an office of his own, with typewriters, duplicating machines and everything, as a produce merchant. The government had given

him a couple of years' training in a Moscow art school, to develop his gift, but he speedily came to the conclusion, while in Russia, that there was more money in business. He was not doing any carving at all, he told me.

The naturalist's northern Siberia is a wonderland of great promise. Hardly any investigation has been made of the insects, birds, smaller animals, spiders, myriapods, reptiles, batrachians, molluscs, worms, plants, lichens, mosses, and fungi up there. There must be hundreds of new species to be discovered, and all manner of biologically interesting sub-varieties of southern Siberian species, modified by climatic conditions. The British museum authorities told me that the little collection of plants that I brought to it from the province of Yakutsk was actually the first of the kind to have been made for them. Seeböhm did some good work among the birds of certain areas a generation ago, but I am unaware of any American, or other Briton, who has done anything but shoot for the pot and the billiard-room wall.

Of the plants that I collected in the Yakutsk



country, half were either species found in Britain, or forms closely allied to such species. Wild roses and purple flags blossomed in profusion, harebells and coltsfoot, wild carrot and dead nettle, ragwort and tansy. Dwarf pinks teemed where the turf was dry, and drifts of Canterbury bells and larkspur lent an oddly gardenish aspect to many a marshy glade in the wilderness.

Up in the very furthest North, you have to kneel down in order to be sure that what you see under foot is really a grove of trees, for the tiny dwarf willows, two or three inches high, squirm about among the tufts of coarse grass and herbage of the *tundra*, like trailing sprays of creeping jenny. Yet, before the time of the mammoth, forests of great trees once existed there, as is shown by the remains cold-storaged in the subterranean ice reefs of the New Siberian isles.

What is surely the biggest fool in the world, among this earth's many misguided creatures, dwells up in the pools of wet snow and melting ice along the Arctic seashore—*Metridia armata*, an

erie little phosphorescent crustacean. He finds himself most comfortable in salt-water slush at a temperature of just two or three degrees below freezing point, and even freezes hard as iron without seeming to look any the worse for it when his enveloping ice melts, though, presumably, there is a time-limit of months, years, or centuries beyond which his suspended animation suspends for good and all.

Polar bears are plentiful in certain regions. Somehow these magnificent brutes sink in your estimation when you discover that instead of exercising their huge bulk and apparently prodigious strength in tackling sizeable prey such as brown bear, wolf, elk, or walrus, their main quarry are the little striped lemmings which trek about on the coast of the Arctic ocean in dense armies that often cover so large an area that they must contain hundreds of thousands of individuals. The lemming is a rat-like creature that any tom-cat could catch. The polar bear follows the armies about and scrunches up the little beasts like so many choco-

lates whenever he feels hungry. No, he is no Dempsey of the wild-beast world—he is merely a Wall street operator.

Wolves are seldom seen along the shores of the ocean or in the bleak expanses of *tundra* of the far North; they are south in the forests. The little Arctic fox, however, is quite at home, on account of his protective colouring, as is the Arctic hare.

Practically all the reindeer are domesticated; most of such wild ones as you encounter are strays from the herds owned by the Indians. The Russians themselves do not farm deer. Reindeer in northern Siberia reminded me of bamboos in the Malay archipelago—they are so all-important to the people. The Indians wear a sort of romper suit of the pelt as their normal winter clothing. The meat is eaten fresh and smoked. The sinews are carefully dried and prepared for use as sewing-thread. From the bones and horns are made needles, knife handles, and a considerable variety of domestic implements. The Tunguses, Koriaks, and other races ride the deer at times, and I have seen a Tungus ride into a white settlement with a baby

in each of two pannier cradles slung across the beast's flanks. It is one of the time-honoured Tungus jokes to ask you to try to ride a reindeer. If you are a tenderfoot, the deer sits himself down, like a Christian, the moment after you have mounted—the mistake you have made is to plant yourself too far aft. You must sit right over his forelegs. The distribution of the reindeer is curious. Broadly speaking, he skips the central east-west zone of Siberia entirely. Southbound, you lose sight of him after crossing the Arctic circle, and you do not encounter him again until you have come to the slopes and Alpine valleys of the Saiyansk mountains, on the border of Mongolia.

The peninsula of Kamchatka has a most interesting fauna of its own, about which very little is known. Along the coast range the sea lion, the sea bear, and the sea otter. The sea bear is almost extinct, and the sea otter has been so hunted for its very valuable fur that it is likely to die out soon.

In the mountains ranging up into the tundra of northeastern Siberia roam the rare Lena big-horn sheep, a head of which I brought back for the col-

lection of stuffed mammals at the British museum.

The *tundra*, once away from the haunts of man, is wonderfully rich in bird life, which is only to be expected, seeing that in summer a large area of it is almost trackless swamp. Waders and water birds predominate, among them Temminck's stints, reeves, dunlins, Buffon's skuas, red-necked phalaropes, reed buntings, yellow-head wagtails, Lapland buntings, Arctic terns, Bewick's swans, Siberian herring gulls, snow buntings, ptarmigan, and teal. Thus far, about three hundred kinds of bird have been recognized in Siberia, some fifty of which are non-European. Most of the European species, however, have developed noticeable colour differences and variations of marking. The lesser-spotted woodpecker, for instance, has developed entirely white breast plumage, without the customary spots.

I suppose that I ought to have been enthusiastic over the rarities, but the birds up there that gave me the most pleasure were the swallow and the little cockney sparrow. Up in the very coldest region of the world, where winter temperatures

are far lower than at the North or South Pole, the London house sparrow has penetrated and made himself at home. He did not seem quite so perky and noisy as he does in the cat-haunted squares of Bloomsbury. The struggle for existence each winter in seventy and eighty degrees under zero Fahrenheit probably sobers him. He is not numerous, either.

Swallows are plentiful. They stay only a very few weeks. Already, at the end of July, they are assembling in flocks for the southward flight. Like their kin of Britain and western Europe, they winter in south Africa, but whereas the western European nesters go back and forth along the west coast of Africa, past Senegal and Nigeria, those of Russia and Siberia follow the river Nile from south of Lake Victoria Nyanza, and then head northeast, for thousands more miles, until they reach the spot in which they lived the previous summer. Every now and again they dislocate the entire trade of Yakutsk town, early in August, and necessitate frantic eleventh-hour activity with pen and scissors in the office of the little local news-

paper, by perching in such numbers along the single strand of telegraph wire that links up with the railway zone, two thousand miles south, that the wire breaks in several places.

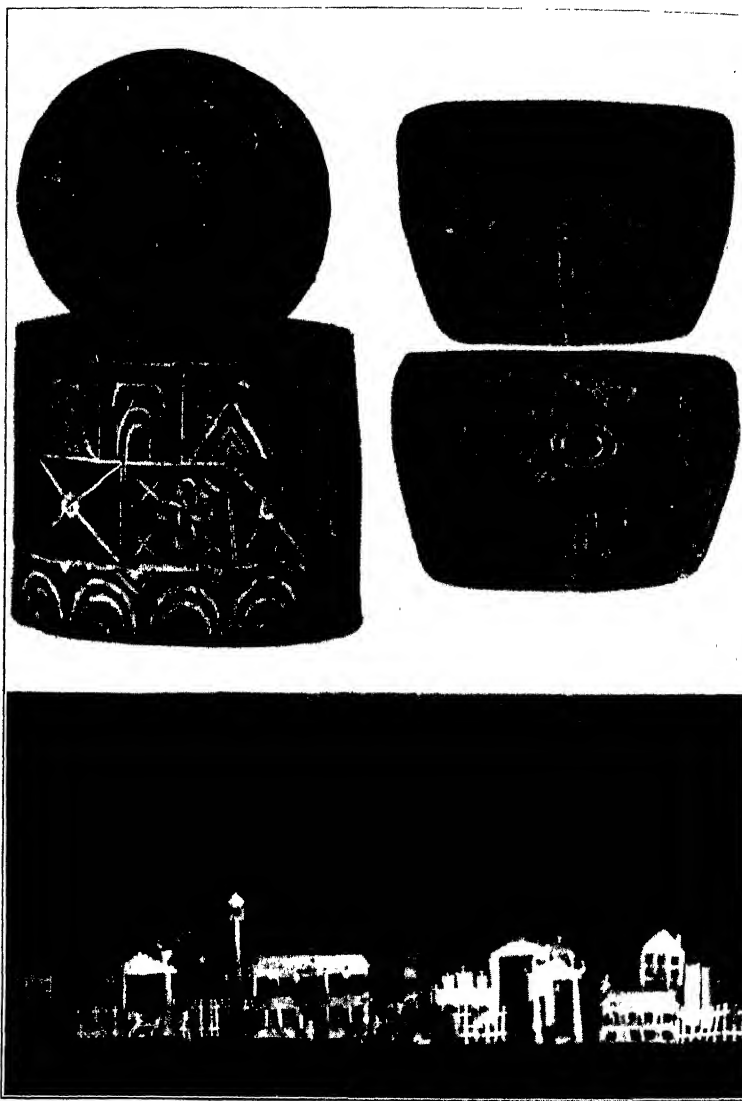
I often saw kites, falcons, and a small brown eagle. Falcons were very plentiful and strikingly tame. They sat low, on stumps or branches only four or five feet above the ground, and did not take wing until I was within a hundred feet or so of them, and then only when I was riding straight toward them, not passing. I never saw a magpie or a black-and-white crow, of which there are many down south in the steppe zone. Wheatears, red-throated pipits, lapwings, fieldfares, and red-polls were sometimes plentiful. Asiatic golden plover and bluethroat were scarce.

There were parts of the southern verge of the *tundra*, in the Lena valley, where the glades and much of their small fauna and flora reminded me of the New Forest, in the south of England—small pines and big bushes of willow, sallow, and hawthorn; “rides” of springy turf fringed with rich lush grass, gay flowers, and luxuriant foliage; the



*Top: FORCED LABOR OF CONVICTS IN NERTCHINSK PLACER GOLD MINES; center: CONVICTS WASHING IN PLACER GOLD MINES; bottom: TERRACE GOLD MINING ON THE RIVER NAKATAMI.*





*Upper left:* NATIVE ORNAMENTAL WOODEN JAR FROM PROVINCE OF YAKUTSK; *upper right:* COLUMBIA RIVER STONE JAR MADE BY PREHISTORIC NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS; *bottom:* YAKUT CARVINGS IN MAMMOTH IVORY.

same water-meadow flowers, clumps of pink willow-herb in the swampy spots and drifts of white crowfoot on the pools; dragonflies skimming to and fro, pouncing like tigers of the air on little winged insects; dainty fritillary butterflies, and whites, and little metallic blues and coppers, rising and dipping among the golden heads of ragwort. Bees buzzed sleepily among the flowers, and hoverer-flies darted hither and thither, poisoning like tiny helicopters.

Now and again, indeed, I caught sight of a bough of thorn leaves larger than those of the New Forest hawthorn; a timid marmot, sitting up on his haunches like a toy, to listen to some meaning-fraught sound imperceptible to the human ear; a butterfly of a breed that had never been netted on Lyndhurst Hill. Then my attention would be monopolized by a pertinacious mosquito of quite un-English ferocity, that had found its way into the bag of black gauze in which my head was tied. Or I would pluck a tough-stemmed flower—and up would come the whole plant, with frost crystals in the soil adhering to the longer of its straggling

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roots. Even in midsummer, which does not arrive until mid-July, up there in the Siberian north, the earth is always frozen a few feet under the surface. Under bushes and among rocks and stumps where little or no direct sunshine falls, the frost is almost on the surface.

Grasshoppers and spiders were abundant, and there were numbers of cicadas with black-spotted red wings. Many of the butterflies were familiar friends—three or four kinds of fritillary, small tortoise-shells, small heaths and coppers, many dainty little blues and a few hairstreaks. One elusive butterfly among the upper branches of the big salallows looked like the white admiral, but I was unable to make certain of it. Around Olekminsk where the *tundra* zone blends into the *taiga*, I found the commonest butterfly was that great prize of the British collector, the black-veined white! Another British variety which occurs in Siberia is the lovely Camberwell Beauty, a specimen of which came down to drink from a thawing ice-gully in my camp on the bank of the Shilka, one spring morning.

The leaf-cutter bee is busy in the *taiga*, but I found no traces of his work up in the *tundra*. Spiders were numerous. I saw no wasps, hornets, or wood ants. The only land mollusc I noticed was a tiny snail hardly bigger than a pea. Small water snails were numerous, but I found no slugs. Nor did I find toads, though frogs occurred occasionally. What an extraordinary life is led by a *tundra* frog! From September to June he is frozen so hard that he breaks into bits like a china toy if you take him from his place of hibernation and drop him on a hard surface. (It would be interesting to discover whether *tundra* frogs live longer as a compensation for existing in a state of suspended animation for nearly three-quarters of the year. . . .)

Now let us look at northern Siberia from the trader's point of view. The furs and hides bring a good living to many, but the development of the country is sorely handicapped by the difficulties of navigation along the coast of the Arctic ocean. "If only we could tilt the continent up a bit," they exclaim, "so that the big rivers flowed the other

way!" The timber available for making newsprint exists in enormous quantities, and it is really astonishing that no paper-mill industry has yet been started, on the banks of the Ob, the Yenisei, or the Lena. Lumber for building purposes is useless if rafted down to the Arctic mouths of those rivers, as there is not time to move it either east or west to a warm-water port before the freeze-up, and navigation is too precarious along the Arctic ocean to tempt any charterers to endanger ships for a cheap cargo like wooden planks. Sporadic sea-borne trade between Norway and the Ob and Yenisei has been undertaken in several summers, but it is a risky game of puss-in-the-corner with ice-fields, though little observation stations, along the line of route, which send wireless ice reports, have proved very helpful; and only valuable cargoes are worth while. The approach from the Pacific is more difficult still, for enormous ice-fields, driving before the capricious mighty winds that roam northwest of the Bering strait, are never far away, and may entrap the rash vessel that ventures into their domain and bear her captive

away to the empty wildernesses around the Pole, never to return. A state-owned line, called the Russian Volunteer Fleet, used to send a highly reluctant tub up from Vladivostok, each summer, to round the corner of the T'chuktches' country, wheeze along as far as the estuary of the Kolyma—and hustle back home again. When I made enquiries about her in the Vladivostok office of the concern, harassed glances and grimaces were exchanged, and I was strongly dissuaded from entertaining any ideas of availing myself of her facilities. As far as I could gather, she managed to arrive only about every Leap Year, and did not always manage to return until the following summer. But she made a brave show on the wall chart illustrating the lines of route. The extra several hundred miles on to the Lena estuary is altogether too risky and is not attempted, officially or otherwise, from the Pacific.

The Ob and the Yenisei are still fine wide rivers as far up as the Trans-Siberian railroad. How extraordinarily wide the Yenisei seemed early in the days of the World War, when it became known

that secret agents of the Central Powers were doing their utmost to blow up the big bridges along the Siberian road, in order to impede the westward flow of troops, cavalry remounts, stores, and munitions!

After a few crossings of trains had synchronized with a splash, a big bang, and some damage to masonry or girder-work, every train was halted before it reached the bank, and boarded by wild-eyed, shaggy-bearded soldiers, each carrying a rifle with fixed bayonet, and imbued with the conviction that in the next few minutes a little prompt ruthlessness, accompanied though it would be by a nasty mess on the carpet, was going to save the empire and send his name echoing gloriously down the corridors of time. At two or three o'clock in the morning, sleepers were aroused by a banging on the door and shouted commands of an incomprehensible portent. Many a foreign woman in a first-class compartment sat up in alarm in her bed, supposing that a raid of brigands was beginning, and more than one door was crashed in with rifle butts, in those days, when the terrified inmates

declined to open. The lights were switched full on; the soldiers, with their loaded rifles ready and their gleaming bayonets flickering, planted themselves here and there among the passengers—especially in the vicinity of any foreigners they could discover—and after much shouting and excitement outside, the locomotive gave a doomed wail of despair, shuffled a bit, then very slowly approached the bridge-head, and drew us out on to the bridge. I, for one, felt much more as though I were being forced to walk the plank than as though I were being conveyed across a railway bridge. There was that in the eye of the ruffian standing guard over my compartment which told me that if the predestined bomb artist, who was to cut the Trans-Siberian, did so by heaving his package out of a window of *this* train, one of the first swift and painful eviscerations of foreigners would be mine. My sardonic companion was doing his best to make me grin at our guard by remarking in English what a gay scene would ensue should some wag blow up a paper bag and pop it with a good loud bang, and the more I exchanged stares with our



guard, the more dismally certain appeared the fate of being yanked out into the snowy night in my pajamas at the other side of the bridge, and promptly shipped to

“ . . . the mines of quicksilver

That loosen the teeth in your jaw,”

or some even worse destination, for jeering at constituted authority, if I once let myself grin. It was a good joke, but not a “button-buster.” Had I not been staring at, and being outstared by, this hairy and horribly well-armed “*bad hombre*” of the Siberian wilds, I should probably merely have given it a momentary smile. But, such is the force of repressions, the more I thought of the turmoil that would ensue if that paper bag were popped, the more I wanted to laugh, loud and long. I bit my cheek until it hurt and went on hurting. It made me wince. The guard probably thought I had toothache. . . . Slowly, slowly, with clankings and reverberations, the train trundled on, until, at long last, came the change of tune that showed we were over. And, with a disappointed scowl, he

turned and joined the others who were dropping off. I never crossed a river as wide as the Yenisei at Krasnoyarsk! . . .

The Lena, however, after demonstrating to the south-bound traveller from the Arctic, for a couple of thousand miles, that it is one of the most majestic inland waterways in the world, suddenly shallows and tails off into an insignificant, knee-deep stream, in the mountains on the west shore of Baikal, about two hundred miles north of Irkutsk, necessitating a few days' portage by cart or sledge for all wares passing between the vast northeastern province of Yakutsk and the railroad. Obviously a northward spur from Irkutsk, if not an extension all the way along the bank of the river into the heart of the Yakutsk country, ought to have been built years ago, and, indeed, such a railroad has been surveyed. It would be cheap and easy to put through the first part of the project, but state enterprises of that sort move very slowly in the Russian dominions.

There are now three or four shallow-draught steamers plying on the Lena and its lower tribu-

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taries, the Vitim, the Vilui, the Olekma, and the Aldan. They have odd little ways, like unexpectedly stopping in mid-stream at three o'clock in the morning and swapping all their passengers and freight. When one of the two happens to have far more passengers than the other, and all want cabins, including a woman with an idiot son, a couple of cases of smallpox, several drunks, and a large number of dogs, goats, calves, fowls, and ducks, a few squalling babies, and a man who died yesterday, with his entourage of lighted candles and sorrowing relatives, you do not need my harrowing description of what the transshipment is like! Also, there is a glorious uncertainty over how far upstream you will get; it all depends on the amount of rain the country has been experiencing of late beyond Ust Kutsk. If it has been dry to the east, you have to tumble out there and continue for a few days in small boats captained garrulously by peasant women and towed by amphibious horses that trudge, day after day, through the shallows along near the bank.

An enormous quantity of gold exists in Siberia,

and more is continually being located. The mines occur, here and there, all the way from the Urals to the Pacific coast, but unlike the fields in America, Australia, New Guinea, and elsewhere in the world, they offer no opportunity for the prospecting adventurer. As an enterprising young mining engineer, on holiday from Leningrad, dolefully put it, as we sat round the *samovar* one evening: "Wherever one finds gold in this country it belongs to some one else—the government or a concessionaire company. The place may not even be on the map." As a result, a great deal of the yield of official, and non-official, mines, finds its way to unauthorized possessors. A continual stream flows across the Trans-Baikal frontier into Mongolia, and down into China. Many a quiet and prosperous little foreign house of business in northern China really exists for the purpose of devoting a little extra attention to the contents of bales and barrels of merchandise from Mongolia bearing a certain inconspicuous mark on the label. What the custom-house officials at the northern posts of Manchuria object to, however, is the practice of stowing

stolen gold inside the corpses of Chinese residents of Siberia that are sent back for burial among the remains of their ancestors. A good deal of this has gone on. . . .

Queer stuff, gold. One pictures it as lumps that shine like polished brass, or as handfuls of glittering flakes. A nugget is generally a dull-surfaced lump, with dirt clogging its pits and crevices. How disappointed I was at the stuff they were getting out of the first mine I visited, near Salaiyeer, in southern Siberia! It looked like dry mustard, after it had been burned out of the quicksilver in which the tiny particles lodge in the sluice.

The chief well-opened gold area is the Lena field, a couple of hundred miles north of Baikal; it is like a little country within a country. Its metropolis is Bodaibo, a town not even to be found in most foreign atlases and gazetteers. The goldfields company pay the expenses of the courts, the schools, and almost all the public services. At first the primitive methods of mining led to pretty well as much gold being stolen by the Russians employed as

reached the coffers of the company. The miner who found a nugget just naturally stole it, unless an overseer's eye was on him. A friend of mine, an American, who was a consulting engineer up there, told me of a miner who found such a big nugget one day that the only way he could get away with it was to slip it under his blouse-shirt, bend into a stooping position, hugging it to the pit of his stomach, and then simulate a painful stomach-ache. After he had sat for a while on a rock, moaning and swaying down over his bunched-up knees, muttering, "*Bozhemoi* (O my God!) What a pain I've got in my stomach! Oy! Oy!" the overseer went up to him and said, "You'd better get back to camp and go to bed!"—and then stalked him back. When the sufferer got out of sight, along the forest track, the overseer saw him stoop, scramble up a few handfuls of pine needles and bury something, before going back to the miners' barracks. . . . The overseer retrieved what was hidden there and had a word with the camp doctor. That night the finder of the big lump of gold was

treated to a dose of physic that gave him a good, genuine, old-fashioned tummy-ache. . . . And nothing more was said about it.

Another Klondike is now developing in the Aldan watershed a few hundred miles east of the town of Yakutsk. So fabulously rich were the early "strikes" that the Soviet government dispatched an expedition of trusted mining engineers and administrators up into northeastern Siberia to investigate. A state concern called the Aldan gold trust was organized, and put in complete charge of a region of six thousand square miles, where the yield is declared to work out at a ton of gold to every fifteen square miles. A report of the expedition which I have seen declares:

"There are eight thousand prospectors in this region." (From other quarters I have heard that twelve thousand is a more accurate figure.) "They are grouped in eight settlements. Indiscriminate prospecting is no longer permitted by the trust. The miners are compelled to work in groups; otherwise they are not allowed to buy necessities from the stores of the trust. Each group is allotted

a claim, which it must work thoroughly before it may obtain another. The time has passed when individual miners obtained three to five pounds of gold a week, and no miner is now permitted to take more than five pounds of gold dust and nuggets from the district with him, but, despite stringent control, much smuggling is going on. The Chinese are the worst offenders; for decades *the bulk* of Siberian gold has been smuggled into China. We hope to put a stop to this. The prices at the stores of the trust were very high, until some Siberian co-operators established branches in the region. As the result of competition" (rather a nasty blow, this, for the Moscow sticklers for state ownership) "it is now possible to purchase a *pud* (thirty-six pounds) of rye flour for sixteen roubles, and a pound of butter for four roubles. The average income of the miners now is ten roubles a day. One half of this goes for food, and the remainder may be placed on deposit in the branch of the State Bank which has been opened. *However*" (continues the report, with unconscious humour), "*few miners take advantage of the banking facilities.*



*The average level of intelligence of the male population of the region is very high.* There are many lawyers, students, engineers, and also other bourgeoisie who have been banished to Siberia for speculation during the past few years, who have succeeded in reaching the gold-field. There are very few women and they are employed as cooks. During the brief summer the miners begin work at five in the morning and stop at nine in the evening. Because of a great shortage of clothing, and as many of the men work in the icy water without rubber boots, there is much sickness. There is only one doctor in the entire region" (six thousand square miles!) "and he is the highest paid physician in the Russian domains, receiving three hundred roubles a month from the state. There is much dysentery and in summer fevers are prevalent. The living quarters are bad. Because of the severe winters and the crowding of the miners in poorly ventilated log cabins, the death rate in winter is even larger than in summer." The expedition closed its report by urging that large quantities of

clothes, boots, food, and medicine should be sent out to the gold-field as soon as possible.

In winter, when I visited the Salaiyeer placer mine, the miners were working on a sharing system that was yielding them only twenty kopecks a day each (plus the nuggets which they spotted in one or other of the washing sluices when the inspector's back was turned). They could have obtained farming and transport jobs at five times as much, but they preferred the hope of making a big strike; they earned nearly a rouble a day in the summer, and the mine had once produced a share-out of seven roubles a day for several weeks.

The northern Siberia of the prospector is a truly tantalizing region. The country is very rich in minerals and ought to be producing an enormous amount of wealth, but it is exasperatingly tied up by a tangle of dog-in-the-manger interests and concessions that render small private enterprise, such as that which has speedily developed new mine-fields nearly everywhere else in the world, impossible. What has happened, however, is that a very great deal of work has been done by pros-

pectors grubstaked by town store-keepers and others, who are just keeping quiet in the hope of seeing a chance some day of turning what they know into a snug deposit at the bank—not necessarily getting possession of a claim and selling it, but generally arranging through a middleman, or consortium of middlemen including officials and merchants too “big” to be double-crossed with impunity, to let the state or a large concessionaire company know where there is valuable ore. So much double-crossing does go on, and so much intermediary graft is involved, especially over copper and gold, that it is far more the exception than the rule for a discovery to be divulged.

The northern Siberia of the investor, and of the wandering foreigner such as I was, are as curtly to be dealt with today as were slithery reptiles in that legendary book about the Emerald Isle. [Chapter 14: Snakes in Ireland. There are no snakes in Ireland.] There are the makings of innumerable sound development enterprises in northern Asia; but what happened to the money that tens of thousands of foreigners *with small incomes* lent

to Russian companies operating in Siberia prior to 1917? It was simply stolen outright by the Moscow gang on the grounds that tsars, not fellows like Lenin and Trotsky, were bossing the country in the days when the money was lent. It would be just as defensible, neither more nor less, for the Washington cabinet to forbid American railroad companies to pay dividends to foreign stockholders because the stock certificates were sold at the time of the administration of Grover Cleveland or Woodrow Wilson. No court of equity and justice on earth, even among the Yakuts of the Arctic or the cannibals of New Guinea, would put a deal like that into what it declared was "idealism." What makes that theft of every cent of small investors' money lent to Russia and Siberia more extraordinary is the noisiness with which Moscow announced to the world that all men are brothers and that frontiers exist only on paper. That, of course, is the case, and most of us, energetically waving our flag for our country as we wave it for our home team or our home town, realize it as well as Moscow—but, thank God, we

do not demonstrate our belief in the brotherhood of man by openly stealing the money that was lent us, to develop our business, by the fellow on the other side of the fence!

If you've got a sense of humour, you'll join me in an involuntary grin over the fact that in no country on earth today is a wandering foreigner, innocently interested in seeing a new land and its people, so certain to be murdered "by order," or robbed and flung into a foul mediæval jail for months or years, as in Soviet Russia—"the glorious apostle of internationalism and the brotherhood of man."

I do not want to see a tsar back in the saddle in Russia and Siberia, if the people can get an honest president. From the years I spent in the Russian empire, I should pick Will Rogers as the ideal sort of man for the job. I mean it seriously. One can't imagine any one heaving a bomb at Will, or Will sitting late into the night arranging to demonstrate his love of humanity by squeezing a few more thousand folks into already overcrowded jails. And they like his sort of unassum-

ing, shrewd, genial jolly along. If you stood Will Rogers in the Red square, at Moscow (with a good interpreter), opposite that humourless, crazy loon Trotsky, and set them to debate the brotherhood of mankind, I'd bet my bottom dollar who'd be boss of that town by sunset—but for the local brotherhood of machine-guns.

However, if history teaches anything, it teaches that no gang of bad-tempered fanatics and crooks dominate a country for long. Even now, Moscow does not rule Russia and Siberia—it merely exists like a gang of mediæval brigands, by picketing the road in and out of Russia and levying heavy toll on the exports and imports of 150,000,000 peasants who have no sympathy with it; and expends its spare time in devilish attempts to wreck the rest of the world.

In educating the masses, the Moscow gang is forging the weapon that will put itself to the sword. Until then, Siberia is suicide for your money or yourself.









